



UNIVERSITY  
**MIDDLE**  
UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

**UNIVERSITY MIDDLE**  
**MEMPHIS, TN**

**FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

All around the country there is a quiet revolution going on in secondary education. This revolution has turned a skeptical eye on test-focused models of success, in favor of emphasizing the development of the various skills that mark a truly successful person – from the successful college student to the successful business person, doctor, lawyer, artist, or engineer. Behind these efforts lies a unifying drive: to develop the *mindset* of a lifelong learner and problem solver.

Correspondingly, these schools are turning away from traditional teacher-centered instruction. They are turning away from classes segregated by subject, solitary learning, hierarchical grading systems, and rigid classroom environments. In their place, they are putting **project-based learning**, interdisciplinary unit study, collaborative problem solving, **competency-based assessment**, and flexible learning spaces.

The result is a totally new kind of school...A school that reflects the demands of the dynamic, high-tech, diverse world in which we actually live. A school where students don't just *see* people of different races and genders and religions – they work with them, learn from them, and come to understand them. A school that teaches students to take ownership of their own learning through projects they care about, with results they can touch, display, market, broadcast, or give back to the community. A school where education starts in classrooms but ultimately ends up in the world, and in a way that values hands-on learning. A school that builds its curriculum around the interests of the students who walk its halls.

So, why wait until high-school for all this? Isn't it time to rethink middle school too? We think so. And we hope you agree. More than this, we hope you will join us to bring it to life, as the founding executive director of a totally new kind of middle school: University Middle.

This is an unusual position, and it will require an unusual candidate -- someone who is visionary, open-minded, collaborative, and adaptive -- and someone who is ready and willing to reimagine both the traditional structures and purposes of public education.

**PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

The ideal candidate will be passionate about and have an accomplished background in hands-on teaching and school management experience, and possess the capacity to adapt that experience and success to the unique learning environment that will be University Middle.

The Executive Director will be engaged not only in the school, but also with The University of Memphis, its partners, and the surrounding community, which, as one of the city's most racially and socioeconomically diverse areas, will require strong communication skills and a keen ability to foster a climate of innovation, cooperation, and authentic youth and family engagement. Partnerships and meaningful collaborations with community and

University partners will be at the heart of the project-based learning curriculum. Consequently, energetic leadership and inspired recruitment will be key to the school's success. Coupled with this visionary leadership, the candidate should excel in a balance of administrative skills, including budgeting, assessment, strategic planning, and problem-solving.

Although the school will not formally open its doors until August 2019, pending school board approval, (initially with a sixth grade class of 65 students, after which it will grow a grade a year until it serves approximately 300 students in grades 6-8), this position will begin as soon as possible in order to account for the extensive planning process. The school will leverage its proximity and relationship to the University to connect students with experiential learning opportunities, internships, and action research projects. The school is being launched through a partnership with Shelby County Schools which we hope to have confirmed by late January 2019. This position is contingent upon formal school board approval.

As a new middle school, strong emphasis will be placed on recruiting and hiring highly qualified, racially diverse faculty and staff and building confidence and excitement in the community.

Prior experience in school leadership as a division head, head of school, or principal at a charter, traditional public, or independent school is preferred. Experience as a classroom teacher is strongly preferred. The successful candidate must also have a solid commitment to and belief in student voice, project-based learning, holistic learning and development, and equity. The successful candidate must hold a master's degree or higher in Education, Education/Business Administration or a related field, or have commensurate educational leadership experience.

## **PERSONAL REQUIREMENTS**

Certain personal characteristics are essential for success as the founding Executive Director of University Middle. There is an expectation that the Executive Director will be:

- **VISIONARY and BRAVE:** Be comfortable with the discomfort of thinking in new ways about how a great public school is supposed to look and feel.
- **EMPATHETIC and STRATEGIC:** Be more interested in listening and translating than talking and convincing. Be culturally competent, and capable of facilitating courageous conversations about issues of race, privilege, and (in)equity.
- **APPROACHABLE and COLLABORATIVE:** Be deeply collaborative. Be approachable, accessible, and highly visible.
- **PURPOSEFUL and GROUNDED:** Have a "deep keel" – a secure sense of self that results in steady, unflappable leadership.

## **PERSONAL COMPETENCIES**

- Demonstrates ability to communicate using effective collaboration and listening skills with a variety of audiences including teaching staff, students, parents, university leaders, and community advocates
- Demonstrates ability to write clearly and succinctly in a variety of communication settings (e.g., newsletters, memos, social media)
- Demonstrates ability to collect and analyze data
- Demonstrates ability to develop insightful conclusions and strategic solutions based on data analysis
- Demonstrates knowledge and practice of program development and assessment
- Demonstrates ability to develop, assess, and continuously improve curriculum
- Demonstrates ability to marshal resources, orchestrate multiple activities simultaneously using resources effectively and efficiently

- Success implementing blended learning and/or project-based learning preferred
- Proven track record of nurturing and maintaining partnerships with community organizations preferred

## **ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

From January 2019 to June 2020, the Founding Director will work in partnership with the University Middle Steering Committee to:

- Implement the vision developed by the steering committee
- Lead the development of the instructional program by building on the key principles of this vision
- Lead the development of curriculum, core practices, culture, assessment, and systems to be used by founding staff
- Hire skilled and diverse founding staff for the Fall 2019 opening
- Develop school policies, systems, and structures to ensure the model is implemented with fidelity
- Facilitate student and family recruitment & outreach to ensure the school opens with sixth grade fully enrolled
- Plan and lead professional learning and team building experiences for founding staff

The University of Memphis offers highly competitive and significant compensation and benefits commensurate with qualifications and experience and designed to attract outstanding and accomplished candidates.

Qualified candidates interested in this opportunity are invited to submit a resume and a statement of interest.

Far more interesting, however, will be to know how you imagine the school in its ideal future form -- say, five or ten years from now -- and then to see how you would choose to present a detailed snapshot of what that ideal future might look like, in whatever medium you choose (narrative, illustration, short video, etc.).

Put another way: Based on the information provided and what you have learned about University Middle online, help us see what you believe this school can become in its ideal form, and then provide an accompanying narrative that begins to hint at why you are the person to make that vision a reality.

Interested candidates should apply online at <http://workforum.memphis.edu/postings/20904>. Materials can be addressed to University Middle Steering Committee Co-Chairs, Professor Remy Debes and Interim Dean Katharine Schaffzin. Application review will begin on February 12.