American scholar Warren G. Bennis said, “Leaders are made rather than born.” At Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), that philosophy is driving the Aspiring Transformational Principal Academy, created to attract visionary, passionate leaders who are eager to assume principal roles in underperforming schools in the school district.

“A school without a strong leader is like a ship without a captain – lacking direction and wavering off course,” said Dr. Bernadeia Johnson, superintendent of schools. “Even the best teachers need strong leadership to harness their abilities and capture the best use of their talents.”

The principal academy aligns with one of the school district’s strategic priorities of transforming school leadership. It is an innovative and rigorous approach to identifying exceptional leaders who possess an urgent desire to transform underperforming urban schools and dramatically increase student achievement.

In a small, very selective cohort, participants will advance their skills in change management and instructional leadership through intensive experiential and problem-based learning over 13 months. The curriculum is modeled after the New York Leadership Academy’s nationally recognized aspiring principal program and is grounded in best practices in principal preparation and adult learning.

MPS is partnering with Minnesota State University, Mankato, to offer the program. In addition to the coursework and training, the program includes one year of residency with coaching, certified principal licensure and the opportunity to apply for MPS principal positions with the intention of staying for three years. The principal academy is not an alternative licensure program; Minnesota State Mankato offers certified principal licensure as part of the program.