



## McKenna, a sophomore, New Student, Plan: Unsure



**Meet McKenna.** McKenna is a sophomore who has lived in 4 different cities and has attended 5 different schools in her 16 years. She has just moved to Cedar Rapids from Charlotte, North Carolina. Her mother has been steadily moving up the ranks of leadership of the parent company of Collins Aerospace' and Cedar Rapids is the next stop. They anticipate being here at least three years so McKenna can graduate here. McKenna's parents are divorced and her father lives in another state. McKenna is the oldest of 3 children, with sister Megan (13) and brother Mitch (9).

McKenna is very bright and was in talented-and-gifted programming in elementary, where she enjoyed writing and reading. Over the last few years McKenna has lost interest in those pursuits and her grades, attendance and attitude towards school have steadily declined. She is somewhat of a loner, very quiet, and doesn't work very hard to make friends although she is pleasant enough when in conversation. She carries with her a sketchbook and, when asked, will show you her drawings, which are quite phenomenal.

McKenna dresses very fashionably in a style not yet "in vogue" in the midwest. Beyond drawing, she has expressed an interest in ecological issues like climate change, overpopulation, and resource depletion.

McKenna and her Mom opted for this Magnet school because they both realized that the traditional high school experience was not working. McKenna is pretty excited about this opportunity and looks forward to a smaller school without crowded hallways and many "cliques."

## **McKenna “Week in the Life”:**

It is the first week of school and McKenna has only lived in Cedar Rapids since mid-July. Having had to be the “new kid” several times, she’s not apprehensive or fearful and yet is dreading this day because of all the looks she knows she’ll get when she steps into a classroom. She has heard this school is different, which is why her Mom and her chose it, but she’s skeptical. Will it really be all that different? Will she actually even want to come here everyday?

### **Monday**

McKenna had heard the school was different but, wow, a school in a big office building? Maybe this place will be different. . .

McKenna walks in and is greeted at the front desk on the main floor. “Good morning! Are you attending City View?” the attendant asks.

“Yes, I’m new. I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do.”

“No worries. We’ll get you all set up.” After learning McKenna’s name, she is given a photo ID and the code for the elevator. “Have a great day!” says the attendant and McKenna steps into the elevator with several other learners.

“Hey! Good morning! I’m Javier. You a new freshman at the school?”

“Hi. No. I’m a sophomore, I just moved here in July,” says McKenna.

“That’s cool,” says Javier. “Welcome to the City View! You’re gonna love this school! It’s hard to even call it a school. Nothing like ‘school’ actually. Where are you from?”

“All over but the last few years in North Carolina. Never been to Iowa before I moved here.”

“I can’t wait to hear more about it. I’ve never really been any place except Iowa and Texas, where I have some family.” He gives McKenna a broad smile. “I love your fashion sense, McKenna!”

“Thanks.” Several other learners pipe up and say hello and introduce themselves. McKenna thinks everyone seems pretty nice and genuine.

The elevator stops at the 5th floor where all the learners pile off the elevator.

Inside McKenna finds a large open area surrounded by offices or conference rooms or, she thinks, maybe classrooms. It is bright and the design is modern and professional looking. There’s cool furniture, bean bags, and a bunch of small round tables and chairs. Up front is a small riser, like a little stage, with a big speaker sitting on top. All the learners she rode up with

are laughing and talking while they find a place to sit. Many are sitting on the floor, a group commandeers the bean bags, and yet others head to the back only to return with coffee and bagels. McKenna realizes that she has a panoramic view of the entire city from this school and now she knows why it is called City View.

An adult approaches McKenna. "Good morning! My name's Mark. Welcome! What's your name?"

"Hi. I'm McKenna."

"McKenna! Great to meet you! You're the sophomore transfer from North Carolina, right?"

McKenna is a bit surprised this guy knew that. "Yes."

"We're glad you're here, McKenna. We get started right at 8:30 each morning and we start all together right here in this room. It's our community time. Please make yourself comfortable. In the back of the room we have coffee on as well as bagels. Please help yourself."

"Thanks," says McKenna. She furtively glances around the room. Seems fairly normal. Lots of kids laughing and talking. Mark - a teacher using their first name? Was that right? She heads back to grab a coffee and encounters a group of girls at the counter. One of them turns to McKenna.

"Hey, what's up? My name is Ava, what's yours?"

"McKenna."

"Welcome, McKenna. Good to have you here. Are you a freshman or did you transfer in from one of the high schools?," says Ava as the group of girls all turn to listen. Here we go again, she thinks, getting gawked at.

"I'm a sophomore. I just moved here this summer from North Carolina."

"How do you like your coffee?" asks another girl.

"With some cream, please," McKenna replies.

"Great! I'm Nia and this is Jodi, Mason, Amia, and Reagan." "Hi" all the girls say in unison. "I'd tell you what grade we're all in but grades aren't really our thing here. The five of us are 3rd years so I guess that'd be juniors," says Nia. "Hey, come sit with us for community."

McKenna joins the girls as they gather around a small table. The girls visit about their summer and include McKenna in the conversation as if they were old friends. They have questions for her but it really felt good this time. McKenna relaxes a bit.

“Good morning everyone!” says some guy on the stage. McKenna is startled as the whole group jumps to their feet to clap and cheer. Strange, she thinks. Reagan leans over, “It’s our customary greeting - a standing ovation at the beginning. I know, it seems a bit corny but it’s actually pretty cool.”

The staff of the school are all on stage and they make introductions. Everyone is using their first name, which is different. McKenna is expecting the dreaded Power Point of rules and expectations now but it doesn’t come. “We’re excited to have you here. We start each and every day right here, right at 8:30 sharp. You can get here as early as 8:00 if you like. Badge in and badge out everytime you leave our space. All incoming freshman, follow Charlie to the 6th floor. Learners new to us but who are not freshmen, please reconvene in the Hulk room.” Dan points to a room that has a huge Hulk hand on the door. “Veterans, you’re here. As you remember, today is the day we start building potential Learning Discoveries, get familiar with the Project Pool, add Outbound Project Ideas, and begin to build your schedules. When it’s your turn for your interview, we’ll call you. Have a great day!”

“Have a good morning, McKenna. We’ll catch up with you at break,” says Mason. McKenna gets up and enters the Hulk room where she finds 8 other learners.

“Good morning! I’m Dee, one of the English teachers here. This is Becky, Nikki, and Shawn. We’re teachers here. There are several other teachers and you’ll get to meet them later. We’ll be asking you the same sorts of things today and while that may seem tedious, it’s important that each adult here gets the chance to start knowing you. If we don’t know you, we can’t help you tailor a schedule and build your pathway here.”

McKenna and the others spend the next hour visiting with the team of teachers, sharing information about themselves and the teachers do the same. It feels weird calling them by their first names but they are all so nice. McKenna stays pretty quiet and mostly gives one word or one sentence answers.

“It’s structured break time,” says Shawn. “What that means is that for the next 25 minutes learners and staff get a break and can choose between several options. All you need to do is choose what you want to do and go stand under that sign.” McKenna sees, “Coffee Shop,” “Yoga,” “Meditation,” “Trail Walk,” and “Conversation Circle.” She doesn’t like to talk much so she chooses what seems safest, “Trail Walk.” A group of about 12 assemble with her, all introducing themselves. Ann, another teacher, welcomes them and they head for the elevators, scanning their phones on their way. They take a short walk along the Cedar River. McKenna spends her time with three other learners and they visit the entire time.

The rest of the day includes McKenna meeting with three different teacher teams who all ask similar questions and time with other learners talking about things called Discoveries and projects. The teachers are really curious about what she wants to do, what she likes, what she's good at, what she wants to get better at. . . Each time gets easier and McKenna says more and more. In between interviews, McKenna joins the other learners. Learners are busy telling the teachers what they are interested in, curious about. Several learners are interested in politics and wonder why America is so divided. Dennis, one of the social studies teachers, takes notes and asks questions like, "What sort of Discoveries might interest you around this topic?" Kids share things like: Why are there only two big parties? How is the government supposed to work? Has it always been this way? Is this just like the 60's?

As a group of learners move to the next activity, Project Pool, McKenna asks Nia, "What was that all about?"

"At this school, we get to help build what we learn. Instead of getting put into a Government class, the teachers listen to what interests us right now, then they build short courses about that topic. We then can choose those Discoveries and can learn about what interests us and check off our standards." McKenna only understands about half of all that, but she figures it'll eventually make sense.

By the end of the day, McKenna recognizes there were a lot of projects dealing with fashion, the environment and art. She heard about a teacher offering a US History Discovery focused on fashion history. That, she thinks, would be fun.

The last hour, the 8 new learners are together again. After answering the learners' questions, Al and Dan, the principal, walk them through how standards work, how their schedule will be built, and some basic expectations. McKenna is then asked to write a purpose statement. That was weird, she thinks.

The day ends in a large session called Community. Three seniors lead the session and basically describe their time at City View and answer any questions the 1st years and new learners have. McKenna heads home thinking, "Okay, this is going to be different. Maybe I will like school again."

## **Tuesday**

Today is much like Monday. McKenna again has time to explore projects and project ideas and to visit with teachers about interests and possible Discoveries. In the afternoon she's asked to choose her first project. The team had recommended three to her: A Clothing Upcycle Project, a Water Reclamation Project dealing with rainwater runoff, and "City Street Art," a project with

the city to liven up downtown with art. They all interest her and she ultimately chooses “City Street Art.”

## **Wednesday**

McKenna wakes up excited about school for the first time in, she couldn't remember. Today was only a half-day, but that isn't why she's excited. She gets to start her project today.

After Community, learners all head to designated conference rooms for their project meetings. There are 4 others on McKenna's team. Cassidy, the art teacher, greets them. “Good morning! I'm really excited about this project. Why did you choose it?” Each learner answers. When it gets to McKenna she says, “I'm new to Cedar Rapids and I love to draw. I thought this would be a fun way to get to know Cedar Rapids and to do art. At the University of North Carolina, which I lived near last year, they have tons of street and building art around and I always thought it was so cool.”

The team is introduced to Bryan, a city employee who will be the team's partner. He describes the outcome the City wants - a vibrant, colorful downtown, including alleyways. The team spends the rest of the time talking with Bryan about his ideas and the team brainstorms a large list of possibilities. The team logs their conversations in a program called Head Rush and something called a “Kanban board.” As the team wraps up, each team member is assigned a task - go to a different part of downtown and take a few photos and return tomorrow. They are to look for existing art as well as take photos of areas and places that they think might be a great place for art. They are also given a city to search and find photos of their street art. McKenna is asked if she wants Chapel Hill, North Carolina. McKenna says she'd rather look at a different city but that someone should investigate Chapel Hill. “I'd really like to explore Fort Collins, Colorado. I had a friend from there once and she says they've got lots of cool art.”

“Absolutely!” says Cassidy. “Everyone clear on their tasks? Come with them done and ready to talk about tomorrow morning. Time for Structured Break.”

McKenna chooses Quiet Time for her Structured Break where she grabs a coffee and begins searching for photos of Fort Collins. As she's working one of the teachers, Nate, walks by and inquires as to what she's doing. After telling him, he points to Dan, who's talking with another learner a few tables away. “Dan's daughter went to college in Fort Collins. You should go ask him if he has any photos or remembers any cool places there.”

McKenna thinks, “no way” and then remembers a conversation from yesterday about ownership and responsibility. “What can it hurt?” she thinks. She walks over to Dan. “Dan, I hear you had a daughter who lived in Fort Collins. Is that right?”

“Yes, she went to Colorado State there. Why?”

“I’m researching street and community art and am supposed to find out what Fort Collins is doing. Any suggestions?” asks McKenna.

“Fort Collins has some very cool art,” Dan says. “It’s a very hippish place. I remember pianos all painted bright and just sitting in alleyways where anyone could just start playing. Lots of art everywhere. Wait, I think I have some on my phone.” Dan scans his phone and shows McKenna several photos he’d taken. “Would you like me to share these with you?”

“Yes please. Thanks.” Dan sends them to McKenna’s email as Structured Break ends.

McKenna ends her morning by walking around downtown with a few team members and taking photos. She was shocked to discover all of the coffee shops and restaurants downtown.

Just prior to lunch, the learners are asked to go and sign up for at least two Discoveries and up to four if they wish. McKenna chooses, “Fashion History of the United States,” “Project Food” (which surprises her because this was pretty heavily geared towards science standards and science hasn’t been her thing), and “The Queen’s Gambit” book study. She is also assigned a time for career and community exploration. She actually catches herself looking forward to these classes.

After lunch, McKenna grabs the bus home. Apparently for the rest of the week learners will only be going 1/2 day because the teachers need the afternoon to build all of the Discoveries the kids said they wanted. McKenna starts to think she’s found her home.

## **Thursday**

This morning was spent with her team. To her amazement, not only did she do all her tasks, so did all her teammates. And it was good stuff. They looked at examples from all the other cities and the pictures they took of downtown. They created a list of tasks that needed to be done by Monday. McKenna was tasked with emailing Bryan and sharing their conversation with him. That scared her a bit - she hoped Dee would look over her email before she sent it. McKenna spends her afternoon meeting with Mark, who she chose as her advisor this year. Learners get a say in who their advisor is. Mark carefully walks his advisory learners through the standards matrix and a schedule template. Some of the veteran learners also help explain how things work. McKenna begins to understand that she’s responsible for filling her standards matrix out as she takes her Discovery courses and meets standards in her projects.

Mark also meets with McKenna in a 1:1. They discuss her interests, the project she’s on and the Discoveries she wants to take. Mark helps McKenna build her schedule and, fortunately, all her Discovery times work out. He also asks her to start thinking about what she wants to learn and explore on her own and that they would touch base again in a few weeks.

McKenna leaves for the day energized. She talks her Mom’s leg off about her new school and, for the first time in as long as she could remember, she doesn’t feel alone and like skipping school. Her phone buzzes with a text from Nia. “Kayaking at Ellis tomorrow at 11. Can I come by and pick you up at 10:30? Some hot guys will be there! LOL!” McKenna smiles, she’s definitely home.

**Friday**

Friday’s are “virtual” and special discovery days. Students have the day to work on their online courses, come in for special help, or pursue other interests. Every other Friday students are engaged in a Discovery that is all day. These discoveries are those that can’t be done well in a 75 minute period, like ceramics, international cuisine and cooking, giving back to the community through service work, and field trips. Next week McKenna begins her ceramics discovery, which she is looking forward to.

**McKenna’s First Semester Schedule**

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Community	Community	Community	Community	Virtual Day A  Ceramics Discovery B
Online Coursework	Fashion History of the US	Online Coursework	Fashion History of the US	
Project Food	Online Coursework	Project Food	Online Coursework	
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
City Street Art Project Planning Meeting & Work Time	The Queen's Gambit	City Street Art Project Review Meeting & Work Time	The Queen’s Gambit	
	Career & Community		Career & Community	