Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: SCICAP-Leon Early Head Start

Provider No.: 28397

Address: 1601 NW Church St, Leon, IA, 50144

County: Decatur

Director's Name: Jennifer Mitchell

On-Site Supervisor: Lorraine Strader

Phone Number: 6414468050

E-Mail: jmitchell@scicap.org

HHS Visit Date: 01/27/2026

Licensing Period: 01/01/2026 to 01/01/2028

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 12/11/2025

Comments: Approved fire inspections are due every 3 years by State Fire Inspector Brad Pollard

Report Visit Type:

- [ ] PTO
- [X] Licensing Visit
- [ ] Drop In
- [ ] Administrative Change

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 3

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

- [X] Year-Round
- [ ] School Year
- [ ] Summer Only

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Tuesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Wednesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Thursday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Friday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

- [ ] Infant(0-<24 Months)
- [ ] Toddler
- [X] PreSchool
- [ ] School Age
- [ ] All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	9	12			21
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

SCICAP Head Start offers all day childcare to infants to two-year-old children in the town of Leon. This program opened in 2002 and was previously named Early Head Start Building Blocks. The name was changed to SCICAP Leon Early Head Start. This program is administered by SCICAP in Chariton. Jen Mitchell was appointed director over all SCICAP Head Start programs in southern Iowa in 2023. Each site has an onsite supervisor who meets the 75 points required for the position. Lorraine (Rainey) Strader is the onsite supervisor for this program (appointed in 2020). OSS Strader has a 2-year degree in Early Childhood and has 22 years' experience in a licensed childcare setting. In addition, she was a home based worker for EHS for 2 years prior to accepting this position. Tammy Martin is the designated person in charge if Lorraine is not present. She has been employed at the center for 16 years. In November 2024 she was promoted to Family Resource Advocate. The Family Support worker and other management/administrative personnel are onsite frequently. I made an unannounced licensing visit to the site on 1/27/26. I met with all staff and followed up with Director Mitchell via emails. All program areas were observed at that time. AEA was also visiting at the time of the HHS visit and met with parents in the front office.

This program operates year-round and is located on the edge of town on a busy thorough fare. One side of the building serves infants, and the other side serves toddlers. Each side has its own entrance. The building contains a kitchen and an office area separating the two sides. This building's doors are kept locked at all times.

The building is clean, bright, open, attractive and equipped with a wide variety of child sized furniture, equipment, toys and learning activities.

Some children who attend this program are eligible for wraparound care and can attend all day. The Head Start program

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operates from 8:00am-3:00pm. Wraparound care is provided from 6-8:00 am, and then again from 3-6:00pm.

The program serves newborn infants and toddlers. When children turn three years of age they can attend one of the SCICAP Head Start programs. Infants ages newborn to 24 months are cared for on one side of the building. The other half of the building care is provided to children 24-36 months. Occasionally a child will be moved up when they are 18 months old. This depends on the developmental needs of the child as well as the ages of the children.

Center OBSERVATION:

The infant side has square footage for 10 infants, but typically 4 are served. A hand washing sink is in the classroom as well as a bathroom containing a toilet and sink. This area has historically been used for storage. Large, age appropriate toys for the children to play with are available. Toys are cleaned and sanitized at least once a day. The staff sit on the floor and play and interact with the babies. Redirection and distractions are used with these young babies.

Infant daily sheets are completed daily.

The toddlers are in a room that can accommodate 13 children. Head Start limits the number of children served to eight in this room. A sink is in the classroom, and a bathroom containing a toilet and a sink. Low shelves are used to separate activity areas and to hold the items that accompany the activity center. The items and play materials are age appropriate. The children were engaged in activities that were appropriate for their ages. On visits the past several years HHS has observed many different activities and routines. Staff are involved and engaged in activities the children. The teachers are calm and respectful when interacting with the children. Nap time has also been observed at this site. Cots are spaced appropriately to avoid transmission of disease.

This program uses individual lesson plans for each child. The needs and abilities of children in this age group vary so much that this is an excellent way to make sure each child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs are being met. Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Gold are the curriculum used. Teachers conduct 3 home visits and two conferences during the year.

Center NUTRITION:

The program has a cook and kitchen in this building. I met with with her the day of the visit. The children are served breakfast, morning snack, lunch and an afternoon snack. They participate in the federal food program and serve healthy and nutritious foods. This is a nut free facility. Food is ordered weekly and purchased from the local Hy Vee.

Food items are stored according to NHSPS guidelines. Dry food is stored in cabinetry in the kitchen. I observed this area and the kitchen as a whole to be very clean. The refrigerator and freezer have thermometers that are checked on a regular basis. No cold or dry food items were observed to be expired. No food was open or stored on the floor.

The staff eat at the tables with the toddlers. Sufficient program space is provided for dining to allow ease of movement and participation by children and to allow staff sufficient space to attend to the needs of the children during routine care and emergency procedures. Food is served family style. A ten week rotating menu is posted.

Center HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Medication storage and administration procedures are reviewed. The program typically has a Health & Nutrition Specialist who assists and monitors health and safety issues. Medication is stored in a locked upper cabinet. All prescribed medication must have a pharmacy label intact. All over the counter medication should be labeled with the child's name. These rules were met the date of the visit.

We discussed allergies. Any child with allergies must have a written emergency plan. A copy shall accompany the child if they leave the premises. I sent forms to OSS Strader on 12/18/20 and the health and nutrition specialist in case these forms are needed now or in the future.

Each room has a first aid kit. All items from the First Aid Kit checklist issued by IDPH should be in the center. Items sufficient to perform First Aid are present.

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Environmental policies and procedures were reviewed. This is an all-electric building so a fuel burning appliances inspection is not required. Carbon monoxide detectors are located in both rooms and are required in all buildings. Radon testing was conducted within the past 5 years with a level lower than 4 pci/L. Testing is required every 5 years and it is recommended the testing be done during the winter months when the ground is frozen. The building is on city water, therefore water analysis is not required. The building was constructed after 1960, so a lead based paint assessment is not required. Sufficient ventilation was noted.

Safety policies and procedures were reviewed. The center shall ensure that: The facility and premises are sanitary, safe and hazard-free. No toppling hazards or other safety issues were noted in the rooms. Electrical outlets were covered. Staff belongings, cleaners or other harmful objects are stored out of the reach of children. Sufficient lighting was provided to allow children to adequately perform developmental tasks without eye strain. No items were on the diaper changing tables avoiding cross contamination. Bleach is mixed daily in the a.m.. Staff are aware of the specific dwell time for the product they are utilizing.

Volunteers should always be under the direct observation of staff. All volunteers and substitutes shall sign a statement indicating whether or not they have one of the following:
a. (1) Conviction of any law in any state or any record of founded child abuse or dependent adult abuse in any state.
(2) A communicable disease or other health concern that could pose a threat to the health, safety, or well being of the children.
b. (1) Complete form 595-136 DHS Criminal History Record Check, Form B
(2) Complete Form 470-0643, Request for Child Abuse Information.
(3) Sign a statement indicating the volunteer or substitute has been informed of the volunteer's or substitute's responsibilities as a mandatory reporter.

Any visitors to the Center shall complete the tasks above. All staff employed at the facility are 18 years old or older.

The building has no pets or plants.

Adequate indoor space is provided. The design allows for ease of movement by children and staff and for the observation of all children. Ample space exists to conduct both individual and group activities; allow areas for activities, dining, napping, toileting and diaper change; office space; and break room or privacy accommodations for staff.

Fire and tornado drills are practiced and documented monthly.

Sanitation procedures are reviewed and also monitored by EHS. Toothbrushes were adequately stored. The facility utilizes bleach and water for sanitizing and disinfecting. We discussed other best practice options.

Food waste containers were covered.

Hand washing rules are followed. Hand washing posters and diapering posters were observed.

Center PLAYGROUND:

Adequate outdoor program space is behind the center. Centers shall have a safe outdoor program area with at least sufficient square footage to accommodate 30 percent of the enrollment capacity at any one time at 75 square feet per child. The outdoor area shall include safe play equipment and an area of shade. All of these conditions are met.

There is a large fenced in playground area. The surfacing is poured-in-place rubber in one area, and wood chips in another area. The fence is chain link and is secured at the bottom. We discussed fences settling which creates gaps that may pose as entrapment hazards as we have the past few years. Staff agreed to monitor this., however the fence is new. Outdoor play equipment is secured per manufacturer recommendations. The area contains large motor play equipment, swings and a covered sandbox. The sandbox was covered with a material/cloth tarp which was being used properly. It also contains an area with picnic tables on a slab and a roof overhead that provides shade. Screws on the fence are not facing the inside of the play area. Mildew should be washed off of the climbing equipment.

Monthly inspections are conducted and documented. The Child Care Weather Watch is consulted if outdoor play is questionable due to weather conditions. A first aid kit is taken outdoors.

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Center TRANSPORTATION/FIELD TRIPS:

Parents are responsible to provide transportation to and from the center. The program occasionally takes walking field trips around the center. Field trip permission slips are signed by parents. Walking field trips have been taken in the past to nearby fairgrounds. This center is located on a large piece of land and there is a big paved parking lot around the building. Field trips are not taken out into the community due to the lack of transportation at this site. It walking trips are taken a first aid kit with emergency numbers are taken along.

Center ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS:

The policy of the Early Childhood Program is to use the Program Wide-Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports Model. These focus on adult behaviors/environmental arrangement that are specific to supporting the social emotional development of infants and toddlers. Adults provide children with opportunities to make choices throughout the day. Transitions are short and wait time is kept to a minimum. Adults use verbal, object, gestural and visual cues to prepare children for upcoming transitions.

Child files are reviewed annually including pick up authorizations, emergency contacts, annual physicals and immunizations. Historically they have contained current physicals and emergency information. Parents are notified by OSS Strader if physicals are coming due or need updated. I reviewed child files on site the date of the visit. Holly from the local public health visited in October and conducted an immunization audit.

The program employs 5 staff. Staff files are reviewed annually. All staff had current physicals and other required training documentation (CPR/1st Aid, Mandatory Reporter training, Professional Development, Iowa SING checks and National Fingerprints). Staff file information is kept in the administrative office in Chariton. Jennifer Mitchell, Director at the time of the request (SCICAP Head Start/Early Head Start) from the administrative office in Chariton provides HHS with these records on 1/29/26. It should be noted that SCICAP Head Start has an excellent history of record keeping.

Prior to the preschool year starting, all staff review Head Start emergency policies and procedures, and then review their own specific site policies. An Emergency Preparedness Plan for this site was available. Staff should be trained on this plan and sign and date acknowledgement of such. Staff can take children to the hospital next door in case of emergency. The facility has a storm shelter on the property. When evacuation is necessary the nutrition aide and other staff members assist with evacuating the children.

The SCICAP Early Childhood Program Handbook and the main SCICAP handbook were reviewed. A policy regarding handling of blood, breast milk and other body fluids are present. Biting and limited access policies are present.

All required postings are located on the parent wall in each classroom. This includes the license certificate, consultant contact information, and mandatory abuse reporter notification. Hand washing and diapering procedures were also posted. Emergency evacuation maps were posted by doorways. No smoking signage was on the entry doors. Poison control, 911 and the center address and phone number are also posted.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

Head Start provides a very needed service to the families in Decatur County, and the Early Head Start program also meets the needs of parents with very young children.

Extra services provided through agencies such as AEA can be offered to children and their families when special needs are identified.

Ratio is excellent at this facility.

The program is small and staff retention is high.

The program has an Education/Disabilities Specialist, Tricia Cobb

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3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

1. IPOWER shows some staff do not have all required hours of training including PD hours and Universal Precautions training. HOWEVER, Director Jen Mitchell provided HHS with documentation on 1/29/26 indicating staff do have all required trainings, physicals and both state and federal criminal background checks. NO VIOLATION according to Director Mitchell. However, IPOWER should be updated for all staff to show Essentials training, ongoing PD hours, UP training, MR training, CPR/First Aid.
2. An intoxicated parent policy should be added to the EPP.

4. Any corrective action plans, provisional license, and safety plans-steps to get into compliance

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

ehsleon@grm.net is the program email

The center is aware they may access CCNC and CCR&R Consultant on a consistent basis.

Based upon this review, it is recommended that this center remain in Full licensing status. The center is directed to continue to monitor day to day practice and adjust accordingly to continue to ensure licensing rule is met consistently. It is important to note, all DHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period.

HHS encourages you to contact your local nurse consultant. Child Care Nurse Consultants work with child care and early education businesses. Businesses may call or send questions to a child care nurse consultant about health and safety policies, health programs, health of personnel, and specific child health or safety issues. Please visit the following website for more information. http://idph.iowa.gov/hcci/consultants Your consultant is Heather Marsh.

HHS encourages you to contact Child Care Resource and Referral consultant. They offer centers assistance with meeting the HHS regulations, IQ4K, infant/toddler concerns, room arrangement and environment, developmental concerns, Best Practice information, CDA assistance, or any questions or concerns you may have. Please visit the following website for more information: http://www.iowaccrr.org. Michelle Greenough is your consultant. Consultant Greenough indicated she emailed the program in September and December providing information.

Date: 01/29/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Jill Seibert

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Non-compliance with any of the mandated regulatory requirements listed above may lead to the cancellation or revocation of your Child Care License. Please take steps necessary to completely address each of the violations noted above.

Child Care Resource and Referral is an excellent resource for providers to access training options and support in your area. You can reach Child Care Resource and Referral at **https://iowaccrr.org**.