Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: A Step Above Child Care and Learning Center, LLC

Provider No.: 50771

Address: 2882 Palo Marsh Rd Suite A, Palo, IA, 52324

County: Linn

Director's Name: Michelle McKinstry

On-Site Supervisor: Savannah Petersen

Phone Number: 3198512671

E-Mail: mgreenwalker01@gmail.com

HHS Visit Date: 08/10/2026

Licensing Period: 08/01/2025 to 08/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 08/04/2024

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

- [ ] 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 6:30 PM		
Tuesday	6:00 AM to 6:30 PM		
Wednesday	6:00 AM to 6:30 PM		
Thursday	6:00 AM to 6:30 PM		
Friday	6:00 AM to 6:30 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	12	12	20	24	68
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

A Step Above Child Care and Learning Center (ASACCLC) commenced operations on 8/29/2019. The profit program is located in a building adjacent other local businesses. ASACCLC operates year-round, Monday through Friday from 6am to 6pm. The program serves children age infant through school-age. Total enrolled and attending children were reported to be 42 on 8/10/2026.

ASACCLC founding owner and director is Michelle McKinstry. Ms. McKinstry has experience working with children and participates in professional development. Since January 2026, Savannah Petersen has been the on-site supervisor. Ms. Petersen has experience working with children and participates in professional development.

On 8/10/2026, program space was observed. Primary programming occurs in age defined classrooms. There are restrooms and handwashing sinks to accommodate capacity. The program has access to an outdoor play area. There is an on-site kitchen in which foods are prepared. On 8/10/2026, activities observed included infant cares, various play experiences and outdoor large gross motor play. Curriculum on the day of the monitoring visit was observed to allow for a variety of play experiences that encouraged social emotional growth and child choice. During the monitoring visit, routine transitions were observed including clean-up procedures, diapering, and restroom/drink breaks. On 8/10/2026, staff were observed to be in ratio and actively engaged with the children providing encouragement and positive redirection when needed. Children appeared comfortable with staff.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The philosophy of ASACCLC is "...built around the concept that children are born ready to learn. As caregivers, we strive

to create a learning environment that is safe, stimulating and encouraging..."

ASACCLC sponsors a social media page for enrolled families and current employees.

Ms. McKinstry is a seasoned local entrepreneur invested in children and the community. Ms. McKinstry is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as her own program's policies and procedures. Ms. McKinstry is organized and has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed as required and maintained in a secure manner. ASACCLC has a combination of returning and new staff.

On the day of this monitoring visit, ASACCLC was again found to be maintaining required postings, maintaining a family-staff program information area, utilizing technological communication resources, and offering family programming activities. Curriculum includes a combination of learning strategies including teacher-inspired ideas, off-site walking field trips, on-site guest speaker events, themed days, and holiday/seasonal parties.

As of 8/10/2026, ASACCLC continues to have and update as needed policies and procedures that include those for safety, daily child contact, hand washing, diapering, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. On the day of this monitoring visit, staff and management were able to verbalize how they help ensure the children's space is sanitary and hazard free each day by following their current policies and procedures as well as maintaining checklists for cleaning and maintenance. On 8/10/2026, Ms. McKinstry discussed having continued support from the community, local businesses, the program's families and the building landlord as to daily building and grounds conditions and repairs.

ASACCLC has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. ASACCLC successfully navigated through the 2019 health (covid-19) pandemic, 8/10/20 Derecho Storm, 2021 food supply issues, 2022 infant formula shortages, air quality alerts (2023, 2025, 2026), technology outages (7/19/24 global technology outage, 10/10/2025 AWS outage, 10/29/2025 Microsoft outage) and 2026 nationwide cyclosporiasis outbreak.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

109.9(2)i: Preschool (for children five years and younger not enrolled in school): Physical exam report submitted within 30 days of admission, was obtained no more than 12 months prior to admission, is signed by a licensed MD, DO, Chiropractor, PA, or ARNP, and contains health history; present health status including allergies, medications, and acute/chronic conditions; and recommendations for continued care if necessary.

109.11(8)b: Centers at ground level that use basement area as program space, or have a basement beneath program space: Testing and plan for remedy of radon is conducted.

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

109.9(2)i: Preschool (for children five years and younger not enrolled in school): Physical exam report submitted within 30 days of admission, was obtained no more than 12 months prior to admission, is signed by a licensed MD, DO, Chiropractor, PA, or ARNP, and contains health history; present health status including allergies, medications, and acute/chronic conditions; and recommendations for continued care if necessary.
- One child file reviewed (JF) lacked documentation of a current physical exam, Certificate of Immunization and acknowledgement of annual update.

109.11(8)b: Centers at ground level that use basement area as program space, or have a basement beneath program space: Testing and plan for remedy of radon is conducted.
- Documentation of the most recent radon test results was dated 6/6/2021. Updated radon testing is required. Please forward results from updated testing to licensing.

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Review rule 109.13(2) which states "...Foods with a high incident rate of causing choking in young children should not be served per CACFP FNS-877 (August 1, 2024)..." Young children shall be minimally at least 4yo and younger. Foods with

high incident rate of choking includes hot dogs. Please refer to HCCI's "Choking Prevention" fact sheet https://hhs.iowa.gov/media/2886/download?inline and CACFP's resources and CACFP's website https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/operation-support/nutrition-programs/child-adult-care-food-program.

Review rules 109.10(5) and 109.10(6) regarding staff and child hand washing. Staff and child hand washing with plumbed running water and soap shall occur after diapering, after toileting, before food service and any other time needed to help with sanitation and help prevent transmission of illness.

Replace the infant room diaper station to better fit the children served. The diapering surface shall be nonporous to ensure proper cleaning and disinfecting between each diaper change. Wood is porous.

Replace the hallway cube-cubbies with more child friendly ones. In the meantime, secure the current ones to help prevent a topple hazard.

A group of school-age children are using the toddler age room for 2026 summer care. The majority of supplies being used and offered were and are not developmentally or physically appropriate for school-agers. Obtain a wheeled cart for school-age supplies to be mobile as this age group sometimes uses rooms set up for younger children. Increase school-age materials including books, board games, card games, puzzles, dolls, and so on.

The temperature in some areas of the building was quite warm and while other areas of the building quite cool. Obtain window coverings for all rooms to help regulate the temperature.

Obtain 4 separate (labeled for each room) wheeled carts specifically for help with health and sanitation related to transporting foods from the kitchen to each room, to transport soiled dishes from each room back to the kitchen for cleaning and sanitizing in the dishwasher and to transport fresh clean dishes to each room from the kitchen after cleaning and sanitizing.

If allowed by fire code, install a retractable gate to separate the one outdoor play area into two outdoor play areas as needed throughout the day. This would allow an older group of children and a young group of children to use the outdoor play area simultaneously.

If allowed by the building owner, obtain a shed to be placed outside the fenced play area to help store outdoor materials when not in use.

To help with the items noted in this section of the report, please apply for funding and grant opportunities when they become available including the "Growing Iowa" fund (https://www.iowaccrr.org/child-care-providers/iowa-child-carefunding-opportunities/) designed to support childcare in Iowa by connecting with CCR&R.

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management
Licensing discussed with Ms. McKinstry oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) understand expectations, 2) manage frustrations, and 3) monitor performance. Ms. McKinstry talked about possible participation in Tanager Place's Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) program. Ms. McKinstry discussed being present in the center talking with staff, scheduling extra staff whenever possible, ensuring staff have breaks, swapping staff out, offering a break to the child outside the classroom area, encouraging staff to use good voice tones, establishing child behavior plans, communicating with families and exercising required polices for enrollment and discharge of children as needed.

The program's license remains in full status. All DHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period. Thank you for the visit.

Date: 08/19/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons

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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**.