Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Northeast Iowa Montessori School Inc

Provider No.: 28692

Address: 604 South Ave , Decorah, IA, 52101

County: Winneshiek

Director's Name: Rachael Buresh

On-Site Supervisor: Jane Busch

Phone Number: 5633826491

E-Mail: rachael@neim.us

HHS Visit Date: 10/26/2026

Licensing Period: 10/01/2026 to 10/01/2028

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 03/23/2026

Comments: The renovated space was inspected and approved for occupancy in October 2026.

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 1

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

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

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	7:45 AM to 5:30 PM		
Tuesday	7:45 AM to 5:30 PM		
Wednesday	7:45 AM to 5:30 PM		
Thursday	7:45 AM to 5:30 PM		
Friday	7:45 AM to 5:30 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	0	2	20	8	30
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On 10/26/26 I made an unannounced licensing visit to Northeast Iowa Montessori School in Decorah. I met with Rachael Buresh, the director and Head of the School. Ms. Buresh has a BA in a non-child related field and completed the Montessori Fundamentals Administrative training at the Center for Guided Montessori Studies in Minnesota. She has been the director since 08/17/17. Ms. Buresh is a Youth and Mental Health Credential Fundamentals graduate. Ms. Buresh received a master's degree in Teacher Leadership and Education. She is in school now going for a PhD in Montessori Education and Teacher Leadership. She is ECERS-3 certified and has thirty plus years of business administration experience. Ms. Buresh has received her National Administrator Credential (NAC). Ms. Buresh is going to retire in May 2027. Cydney Weitzel is the administrative assistant.

Heather Vilardo is the lead guide in the classroom. Ms. Vilardo has a BA in elementary education and an MA in special education. She has obtained the early childhood credential for leads through the Center for Guided Montessori Studies. Christine Gowdy-Jaehnig is the former lead guide in the classroom and she is now a mentor and sub in the classroom. Ms. Gowdy-Jaehnig has the American Montessori Society early childhood credential and completed training through St. Catherine's University in Minnesota. She has a BA from St. John's College in Annapolis, MD. Jenny Lenehan is an assistant guide and the lead teacher for the voluntary preschool program. Ms. Lenehan received her BA in Elementary Education with early childhood and reading endorsements from Upper Iowa University. She completed the Children's House assistant's course through Association Montessori International (A.M.I.). Claire Tebbenhoff is an assistant guide and the lunch and rest time supervisor. She is also the after-school care supervisor. She has a BA in elementary education with an endorsement in early childhood and special education from Luther College. She also has a BA in history. Ms. Tebbenhoff has completed the Children's House assistant's course through Association Montessori International (A.M.I.). Erin Smock is in the reading intervention position.

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The center operates out of a free-standing building. They started in their new location in January 2024. They did renovations that were completed in October 2026. The renovations were made so they can use the lower level as a classroom and they made the Children's House larger and added two bathrooms. It operates during the school year, Monday through Friday from 7:45 am until 5:30 pm. The program serves children ages two through six-years-old. The program offers a morning program (8:15-11:30 am) and a full day program (8:15 am to 3:00 pm). A latchkey program is also offered after school for children up to eight-years-old. They currently have 23 children enrolled.

The program also has a school-aged program (E1) for children ages six through nine-years-old. This program is regulated through the Department of Education and is in a separate room inside the building. Jane Busch is the lead guide for this program. Ms. Busch is also an on-site supervisor for the licensed program. Ms. Busch has a BA in elementary education with a middle school endorsement. She has a MA in Montessori Education and has completed the Association Montessori International (A.M.I.) elementary training. Ms. Busch is NAC certified. She is the founder of this Montessori school.

The program partners with the Decorah School District to provide the voluntary four-year-old preschool program. The voluntary program operates Monday through Thursday from 8:00-11:30 am.

The school operates out of one classroom. The Montessori primary environment is referred to as "Children's House". An inspection of the room was completed. Windows provide natural lighting. The NEIM handbook states the program offers a "rich educational environment, including exercises for motor development, self-mastery, and programs in language, reading, math, culture, sensorial, practical life, geography, science, technology, music and art." The goals of Montessori for children are several: it encourages self-discipline, self-knowledge, and independence, as well as enthusiasm for learning, an organized approach to problem-solving, and intellectual and social skills.

The Montessori method is a way of educating young children that stresses development of a child's own initiative and natural abilities, especially through practical play. This method allows children to develop at their own pace. They have a deep respect for children as individuals.

Montessori materials are classified in six major areas: Practical Life, Sensorial Skills, Mathematics, Language, Science and Social Studies, and The Arts. Work areas are established in each of these areas and children move at their own pace and according to their individual capabilities. The work areas were arranged so there was plenty of space for the children to do various activities. There was a good variety and supply of materials to accompany the work areas.

There are two bathrooms in the Children's House, two bathrooms on the lower level, and two bathrooms in Cosmic Explorers (elementary). There is one toilet and one sink in each bathroom. Handwashing procedures were posted in one of the bathrooms in the Children's House and in one of the bathrooms on the lower level. Post handwashing procedures in every bathroom. There is one sink in the classroom that is primarily used for dishes. The center is environmentally friendly and uses a new washcloth each time a child's hands are washed.

Cots are used to nap. Naps are offered but are not required following the Montessori philosophy.

The curriculum is based on the Montessori principles of teaching. The staff also completed Creative Curriculum training and incorporate 10-15 hours each week into the program as part of the voluntary preschool grant. Ms. Lenehan completes GOLD assessments on the children who are part of the voluntary statewide grant. The program uses Fundamentals curriculum. The program has specific presentations that serve as lesson plans. The presentations were available for review on IPads. They use the Montessori Compass app to document the information. They use Power School for the Department of Education. The guides have a plan each day and specific works for the children to learn.

There was a phone with emergency numbers in the offices. Emergency fire and tornado procedures and evacuation diagrams must be posted near all the program doors and outdoor exits in the program. The classroom and lower level were recently painted and previous diagrams were taken down. Please post the evacuation diagrams near the exits out of both spaces. A daily schedule is in the licensing binder but must also be posted in the classroom.

I reviewed documentation of monthly fire and tornado drills. I reviewed documentation of monthly playground inspections. The radon test was completed in September 2025 and the results were within EPA recommended guidelines. The program has a radon mitigation system that was put in place after high results in July 2023. Radon testing must occur every two years when you have a radon mitigation system.

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The annual fuel burning inspection was completed and no concerns were noted. Carbon monoxide detectors are part of the fire safety system. Outlets were protected. The fire marshal inspection occurred on 03/23/26 and the renovations were inspected in October 2026 and approved for occupancy.

The program does not participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) but follow the guidelines. Parents provide morning snacks, lunch, afternoon snacks and after school snacks for the children who stay for after school care. The food items brought in are reviewed by a staff member to make sure they meet the CACFP guidelines. The program provides milk for the children. Children prepare their own snacks and lunch under the supervision of leads.

There is a refrigerator on the lower level. You must add a thermometer. Food items are stored according to NHSPS guidelines. There is a dishwasher on site. Allergies were confidentially posted.

The center uses bleach and water to sanitize the food tables.

The parent information is located on a bulletin board inside the main entrance of the building. The mandatory reporter, child care consultant and the handbook availability were posted. The license was conspicuously hung in the office. A no-smoking sign was posted at the entrance.

There is a fenced outdoor play area the program has developed. It is across the street from the program. It is naturalistic and does not have any climbing equipment. The area is all concrete. There is a dramatic play center. There are trees outside the fence that provide shade. There is a caterpillar tunnel for children to crawl through. There is a soccer net in the area and a basketball hoop. There is a sandbox with a cover. There is a picnic table and small chairs for the children to rest. The outside area has a shed for storage.

Staff and children's files were reviewed at the time of the licensing visit. I reviewed six children files. They were in great condition.

I reviewed one staff file. The staff member has an outdated first aid and CPR training certificate. Her SING background check also recently became outdated.

I reviewed policy and procedures, staff and parent handbooks. Most of the necessary written emergency procedures and policies were present. The program did not have an Access policy. A sample has been provided. Emergency Preparedness Plans have been completed.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The leadership of the program is committed to providing a safe learning environment for the children. The Montessori environment offers a unique learning experience for children. Staff members allow children to work independently. I observed Ms. Vilardo and Ms. Lenehan working one on one with students. Ms. Vilardo was talking with a child about North America. She had a book with several pictures to teach the child. After working one on one with a child, Ms. Lenehan read a book with a group of children. She also reviewed letters with a group of children. Each staff member plays a role in the classroom. I observed staff members respect the children as individuals. They offered to help children with their works and respected the child's decision if they wanted to work alone. They offered the children choices. They used positive redirection when necessary.

Ms. Buresh states the Montessori system has "so many" strengths. She states they have committed Montessori trained staff members.

Ms. Buresh states they have a very supportive Montessori community and families and Decorah has been supportive of the program.

Ms. Buresh stats the Montessori method has a terrific educational curriculum.

Ms. Buresh states she loves the new renovations that were made at the school. The renovations to the basement allow them to have additional program space. This is also the area where the children now eat lunch. The renovations to the Children's

House space enlarged the classroom and added two new bathrooms. The renovations look great.

Ms. Buresh states their students receive great testing scores.

Ms. Buresh states the school is in a fantastic location within Decorah.

The program has an IQ4K level of 1 that expires on 06/30/28.

The school received the National Council for Private School Accreditation. This expires 06/30/32. They are accredited with the state of Iowa as a school.

Ms. Buresh states they have staff meetings every two weeks and the teachers collaborate after school every day.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

109.9(1)c: All files contain documentation to indicate that ongoing staff training requirements are met, including current certifications in first aid/CPR and mandatory child abuse training.
One staff member's first aid and CPR training expired in 09/25.

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

N/A

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

A full license is issued. All DHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period.

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management:
I discussed with Ms. Buresh her oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) Understand expectations, 2) managing frustrations, 3) monitor performance. Ms. Buresh states Montessori teaches peaceful discourse or the “peace rose”. The children are taught right away about what this means. She states staff members offer children in conflict the peace rose. Each child has the opportunity to speak their peace and the other children must listen. She states then the rose is passed on to the other child who has the opportunity to speak their peace. A staff member monitors it. Ms. Buresh states staff members take classes on how to handle humans in general. She states Montessori are well trained at diffusing situations. They also provide information to families on how to handle situations. They teach the children to be peaceful humans.

Ms. Buresh states if staff members are ever frustrated or uncomfortable they call her and she steps in. Ms. Buresh states sometimes children just need to redirect their minds or thoughts. She has taken children outside to run on the playground. She states they also offer “heavy works” such as tearing paper. This allows children to be destructive without causing harm. They change the child’s mind set and then they talk through the situation with the child.

Ms. Buresh states to monitor she stays on top of things right away. She states she has amazing hearing and if she hears anything she will be in the classroom right away. Staff members can also call or text her for assistance.

Date: 10/27/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Becky Frost

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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**.