Iowa Department of Human Services
CHILD CARE CENTER EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE

Name of Center: ExCel Learning Center Daycare **Enrollment:** 31 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 52279

Street: 143 29th AVE SW **City:** Cedar Rapids Iowa **Zip** 52404 **County:** Linn

Mailing Address: 143 29th AVE SW, Cedar Rapids, IA, 52404

Director's Name: Darcel Pledge **Phone Number:** 319-774-6925

On-Site Supervisor(s): Darcel Pledge **E-Mail:** darcel@exceldaycare.com

Date(s) of Visit: 07-15-2025

X **Licensing Visit** X **Unannounced Visit** **Off Year Visit** **Administrative Change**

LICENSING VISITS

New Application **Re-Application** X **NA**

Signed Application (470-0722) Received **Yes** **No** X **NA** **Date Signed:**

FIRE INSPECTION **State** X **Local** **NA** **Is Fire Inspection Approved?** X **Yes** **No** **NA**

Date Inspected: 07-29-2025

Comments :

LICENSE TYPE: X **Child Care** **Preschool (ages 3-5 meets three hours or less per day)**

Financial Type: X Profit Non-Profit NA

Accredition: Accredited NAEYC NSACA Other X NA

Program Serves: X Infants (0-23 mo.) X 2 Years X Preschool-Age X School-Age

Get-Well Evening Care Special Needs

SCHEDULE: X Year-round School-Year Summer Only

HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Age	Capacity
General	18	22	30	28	98
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 08-01-2025 to 08-01-2027
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 08-26-2025

I. IF CURRENT LICENSE IS PROVISIONAL, IDENTIFY THE CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

Not applicable.

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

ExCeL Learning Center Daycare (ELCD) commenced operations on 8/23/2023. The program operates Monday through Friday 6:00am-6:00pm. ELCS provides childcare to children age infant through school-age. Current enrollment is 31.

Owner and combined director/on-site supervisor Darcel Pledge has a MA degree in performance technology training, MS degree in educational leadership and a BA degree in elementary education. Ms. Pledge has several years teaching experience, is a two-time author, is a community education mentor and continues to participate in much child development related training.

On 7/15/2025, program space was observed.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

ELCD offers a variety of childcare options to help meet the needs of families and children in a residential neighborhood of a predominantly urban area.

ELCD has the following website for families and persons in the community learn more about their programs: https://exceldaycare.com/.

The mission of ELCD is to "...provide outstanding childcare combined with an authentic, tailored educational experience for every student...leverage the skills and experience of our dedicated educators to cater to the unique needs of each child..." The program's goal is to "...stimulate and support the developmental growth of every child, with a particular focus on childhood literacy and social-emotional behavioral skills..."

ELCD commenced operations in fall 2023 and will begin celebrating their 3rd year of business in August 2025. Congratulations! The history of how ELCD came to fruition is impressive. In 2023, the Cedar Rapids Gazette newspaper featured an article spotlighting ELCD as an education-focused childcare within the community. In 2022, ECLD participated in the Cedar Rapids Economic Alliance Race for Space competition. ELCD advanced to the semi-finals in that competition keeping founder Darcel Pledge motivated in the education field (https://www.thegazette.com/sponsored-content/new-educational-focused-daycare-excel-learning-center-daycare-launches-in-sw-cedar-rapids/).

Owner and director Darcel Pledge is a local entrepreneur invested in the community's future. Ms. Pledge is a former elementary education teacher having much experience working with children. Ms. Pledge has systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed as required and maintained in a confidential manner. Ms. Pledge is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as their own program's policies and procedures. ELCD has established hiring and onboarding practices that includes professionalism and competitive wages.

ELCD has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. The program successfully navigated through air quality alerts (2023, 2025) and the 7/19/24 global technology outage.

ELCD continues efforts at optimal communication between the program/staff and families. The program has an organized parent-staff/program information center, offers regular program newsletters, utilizes technological communication resources, and supports family programming activities.

Building and grounds are maintained. Classrooms are arranged in a thoughtful, inviting manner keeping learning at the forefront. ELCD's unique curriculum incorporates Iowa Early Learning Standards, progress monitoring, targeted skill development, proactive intervention and development of core skills. Ms. Pledge indicated the curriculum includes weekly teacher planning and structure learning blocks in each classroom that focus on academic, social-emotional and physical development. ELCD additionally offers a variety of program/family events (e.g. staff-family conferences, fall open house, seasonal celebrations), enrichments (e.g. water days, science experiments), and on-site guest speakers (e.g. cheer camp, gardeners, art enrichments, community helpers). Future goals include outdoor playground improvements as well as participation in quality initiatives.

ELCD collaborates well with community agencies including local businesses, various school districts, local higher education entities, and health professionals. The program was previously featured on Everyday Iowa (https://www.kcrg.com/video/2023/09/25/everyday-iowa-excel-learning/) to discuss their 2023 grand opening, fall open house and curriculum. Ms. Pledge reported ELCD has collaborated with Kirkwood Community College's practicum program as well as previously partnered with the Creating Futures Program to support high school interns. Ms. Pledge discussed a new optional giveback mental health support opportunity that is being to give back to both enrolled families and ELCD staff.

Each child is engaged in a daily health check upon arrival for early detection of apparent illness, communicable disease, or unusual condition or behavior which may adversely affect the child or the group. The program has policies and procedures in place for hand washing, diapering, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. Ms. Pledge reported that additional cleaning and disinfecting occurs on the weekends.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Activities observed throughout the rooms were many. Children have access to an array of materials and activities that encourage innovative play. Staff provided a companionable presence allowing children to have many choices throughout the day. Staff discussed how the program has increased the use of sign language for younger children, increased literacy experiences and enhanced opportunities for social-emotional growth including daily circle discussion "how are you today". Routine transitions (e.g. clean-up activities, food service routines, nap rituals) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative play environment. Staff were overheard providing children with meaningful discussion, utilizing positive redirection when needed and encouraging the use of social graces. Children responded well to staff and appeared to be truly enjoying their day.

IV. IDENTIFY THE ASPECTS OF OPERATION THAT FALL BELOW THE STANDARDS REVIEWED:

109.11(3)a: Center shall ensure that: Facility and premises are sanitary, safe, and hazard free. Sufficient lighting shall be provided. Sufficient ventilation. Sufficient heating. Sufficient cooling. Equipment placed in the program area is maintained so as not to result in injury to the children. 109.11(4)a: Center must have safe outdoor program area adjacent to the center, with sufficient square footage to accommodate at least 30 percent of the enrollment capacity at any one time at 75 spear feet per child. Outdoor space must: Be free from litter and unsafe materials and free from contamination by the drainage or ponding of sewage or storm water. Include safe play equipment and an area of shade. Include fencing to protect from bodies of water or vehicular traffic.

- All cleaner, sanitizer and disinfectant spray bottles are to be properly labeled with name of product, EPA registry number and manufacturer instructions including dilution (if applicable) and dwell time. Each staff is to be trained on proper usage of each available chemical used in the childcare (e.g. cleaners, sanitizers, disinfectants). Good labeling can help serve as a reminder. A homemade mixture of reported 1/2 hydrogen peroxide and 1/2 water was found to be used as a cleaner, sanitizer and disinfectant throughout the classrooms. If directed by a health authority to use an OTC hydrogen peroxide mixture with specific mixing instructions for a limited time (such as specific illness), once the limited time has been reached, the program shall go back to EPA registered products with manufacturer instructions. Please reach out to our local childcare nurse consultant (CCNC) Angela Easley for further resources and assistance.
- Outdoor play areas were observed to have much weed-thistle-grass overgrowth. Increase the frequency of weed-thistle-grass control measures to help prevent possible skin irritations, hidden tripping hazards, and transmission of pest-vermin-animal related illnesses.
- Outside the kitchen-room's secondary exit door a cement slab with significant drop-off into grass-weed overgrowth was observed. Remedy.
- Outside the infant room's secondary exit door immense weed overgrowth was observed. Remedy.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

During the annual monitoring visit, some additional items were noted as needing attention. On 7/19/2025, Ms. Pledge provided documentation as to how these additional items had been swiftly remedied and/or were in the process of being remedied prior to this report being completed. Licensing appreciates the immediate response and resolve.

Please continue to routinely review with all staff the need to first clean food tables prior to sanitizing and prior to any food service activities. Please continue to also routinely review with all staff hand washing procedures for themselves and the children.

Please ensure the two toilets labeled as "unusable" are fixed. Capacity also factors in required number of accessible toilets and sinks.

Licensing supports continued efforts to improve and upgrade the outdoor play space as only some areas are currently able to be used. Consider adding some fencing to help decrease any possible instances of running and hiding into areas that are currently not being used.

It is beneficial to note, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) and the local childcare nurse consultant (CCNC) are excellent resources to access training opportunities and support in the area.

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A full license is issued. Thank you for the visit.

*Note: If you are the Child Care Center Director and you feel something is unclear or unjustly cited, please contact your DHS Licensing Consultant to discuss the issue. The child care director may also send a response which will be placed in the licensing file.

*Note: If you are a member of the general public, there may be additional information contained in the public file. You may contact the DHS Licensing Consultant to inquire.