



Health and
Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Iowa Lakes Head Start

Provider No.: 30231

Address: 3200 College Dr, Emmetsburg, IA, 50536

County: Palo Alto

Director's Name: Sarina Smith

On-Site Supervisor: Tracy Fischer - Lead Teacher

Phone Number: 7128525352

E-Mail: ssmith@udmo.com

HHS Visit Date: 01/06/2026

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

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 10/11/2023

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

- ☐ PTO
- ☒ Licensing Visit
- ☐ Drop In
- ☐ Administrative Change

License Type:

- ☒ Full
- ☐ Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 2

- ☐ Accrediation

Program Duration:

- ☐ Year-Round
- ☒ School Year
- ☐ Summer Only



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HOURS:	<u>Year-round</u>	<u>School-Year</u>	<u>Summer Only</u>
Sunday			
Monday		8:00 AM to 3:30 PM	
Tuesday		8:00 AM to 3:30 PM	
Wednesday		8:00 AM to 3:30 PM	
Thursday		8:00 AM to 3:30 PM	
Friday		8:00 AM to 3:30 PM	
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

- ☐ Infant(0-<24 Months)
- ☐ Toddler
- ☒ PreSchool
- ☐ School Age
- ☐ All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General			32		32
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

An unannounced annual visit was made to the Iowa Lakes Head Start program on 01-06-26 where I met lead teacher Tracy Fischer. Tracey is well qualified for the position with a Bachelor's degree and has been the lead teacher of the center since 2016. This program is located in a free standing building on the Iowa Lakes Community College campus behind the main administration office for the college. The program is operated independently of the college and overseen by a separate board of directors. Sarina Smith is the Executive Program Director for this and several other locations and took over that position in 2024. The program provides preschool programming for children 3-4 years of age. The program had previously provided wrap around daycare services under separate grant funding. That funding stream is no longer available and that aspect of the services was discontinued with the start of the 2025-26 school year. There are currently 11 children enrolled in the Head Start class served by 2 teachers and an on-site cook. All aspects of the program subject to licensing standards were reviewed though it is noted that the visit took place during the hours of operation for the Head Start classroom programming.

The layout, design, and operation of the classrooms remains the same as in prior reports. The building has two classrooms. One room is used for primary programming of the Head Start class. The other classroom which was used for the wrap around daycare programming is now being used for storage space only. Restrooms are located directly accessible from the main Head Start programming room. Windows along the exterior walls provide ample natural light, a view of the outdoors, and ventilation. Each room has a direct exit to the outdoors, and a third door serves as a primary entrance to the building. The classroom was observed to be clean and free of any noted safety concerns due to maintenance. The classroom has a large open floor plan that is divided into activity centers through the use of low shelves, furniture, and play structures. The equipment in each center was observed to be in good repair and appropriate to the ages of the children attending the program. There was some change to the organization of the activity centers with a reduction of the teacher desk and work



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area to provide more activity center programming space for the children.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

Good interactions were observed throughout the time of the visit. The program has a strong curriculum with a focus on developing school readiness skills. The lesson plan establishes a general learning theme and specific learning letter, number, color, shape concepts. On the day of the visit the theme and learning concepts were Snow, letter "B", color "Pink", number 6, and shape "Rectangle". The class did follow the planned curriculum and schedule engaging in activities such as teacher lead large group circle time, and self-directed outdoor play. The center uses a positive behavior support approach to managing behavior. One example of this was when transitioning between outdoor play and returning to the classroom for lunch a couple of the children were distracted and non-responsive engaging in an activity of "painting" on the building wall with their wet gloves. Rather than confronting this as oppositional behavior Tracy acknowledged it as a positive behavior but not what they were supposed to be doing at the time and suggesting they could return to it later while encouraging the children to join the group using calm and positive tones of voice. This approach was very effective with the children complying and maintaining a positive learning environment. Ratio was maintained as required with children being supervised at all times.

Good health and safety practices were observed during the visit. The teachers did ensure that the children washed their hands following restroom use, and prior to meal service. Other positive hygiene practices include having the children brush their teeth following meals, use of hand sanitizers, and engaging in routine cleaning. Good cleaning practices are in place with the teachers waiting for the children to be out of the area before using chemical cleaners. Chemical cleaners, personal items, and other materials that could pose a safety risk to children are stored in areas where they are not readily accessible to the children. The center has several well stocked first aid kits which are readily identifiable and out of the immediate reach of the children. Response plans for children with health needs such as identified allergies were posted where they were readily available.

The center has a small kitchen and meals are prepared on-site. Lunch was prepared and served during the time of the visit and good food handling practices were observed with the staff washing their hands before handling food, and wearing food service gloves. All food items were properly stored for both refrigerated and dry pantry goods. A menu was posted and provided a good variety of healthy meal options. Meals are served family style with the children using measured scoops to serve themselves and the teachers providing assistance as needed. The teachers do sit at the tables and eat with the children to model good eating habits and social interactions.

The center has two playground spaces that are used. One playground has a climbing structure and swings, and the other has a large grassy area and play house. The playground with the climbing structure is the space that is primarily used and the equipment was observed to be in good repair. Both playgrounds are fully enclosed by fencing and those clips that were missing had been replaced. Pea gravel is used for fall surfacing and appeared to have a good depth of material though this could not be fully assessed due to winter freeze approximately 2 inches below the surface. The material will need to be assessed in the spring and aerated or supplemented as need to ensure a depth of 9 inches of loose material. The other playground has a play house and wooden platform structure. The geodesic dome climber identified in the prior visit that required fall surfacing had been removed. There are several large mature trees that provide shade in both areas.

All required notices for No Smoking, Consultant Contact, License Certificate, and Mandatory Abuse Reporting were posted in an area that was readily accessible to parents and visitors. Other required postings for emergency egress, contact numbers, hand washing, lesson plan, menu, and daily schedule were also present. Staff files will be reviewed at a later date at the program administrative offices and any concerns will be addressed at that time. Child files were reviewed and found to contain all required documentation and authorizations. All inspection logs and certificates were available and current.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

None Cited.

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

NA



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5. Special Notes/Recommendations

A full license will remain in effect at this time. Please provide a written response to the licensing consultant identifying a plan of action to correct and maintain those aspects cited as not meeting licensing standards and identifying an anticipated date of compliance. At least one visit will be made to the center during the next year.

Date: 01/08/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Ray Salsbury

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>.