Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Kessel Kids Child Care & Learning Center

Provider No.: 19073

Address: 1135 Canterbury ST, Cresco, IA, 52136

County: Howard

Director's Name: Katie Polashek

On-Site Supervisor: Katie Polashek

Phone Number: 5635473006

E-Mail: director@kesselkids.com

HHS Visit Date: 02/18/2026

Licensing Period: 03/01/2025 to 03/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 12/06/2024

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 2

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

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

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	5:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Tuesday	5:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Wednesday	5:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Thursday	5:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Friday	5:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	44	16	63	30	153
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On 02/18/26 I made an unannounced off year licensing visit to Kessel Kids Child Care and Learning Center in Cresco. I met with Melissa Vobr, the director. Ms. Vobr has been the director since 2008. She has a BA in psychology and business administration. She was an assistant director for two years at the center prior to becoming the director. Ms. Vobr has received her National Administrator Credential (NAC). She is also a NAEYC member. Grace Hunholz is an office assistant. Teresa Wolter also helps at the front desk. She is bilingual and helps with translating. They are in charge when Ms. Vobr is away from the center. There are 52 staff members employed at the center.

Kessel Kids Child Care and Learning Center operate out of a free-standing building. The program operates Monday through Friday from 5:00 am until 6:00 pm. They care for infants through school-aged children. The childcare program started in 1993 and they moved to their current location in June 2008. The building was a partnership between the Howard-Winneshiek School District, Head Start, HAWC and Keystone AEA. There are currently 208 children enrolled.

The center operates out of the following rooms: two infant rooms (one for mobile and one for non-mobile children), a room for younger one-year-old children, a room for older one-year-old and younger two-year-old children; a room for two-year-old children, two rooms for three and four-year-old children, and a school-aged room. An inspection of each room was completed. Windows provide natural lighting. The rooms are decorated with multiple pictures of the children and their families, the children's art projects, and posters to assist the children with the learning process, such as the alphabet, shapes, colors and numbers. The children's birthdays were posted. There are areas for circle time.

The centers observed on the day of the licensing visit include library, Lego/blocks, table toys, games, puzzles, transportation, puppets, art, dramatic play, Play Doh, Ipads, writing, math, science/discovery, woodworking, sensory table

and music. Centers were arranged in a manner that allowed easy movement between activities, but it also allowed for clear supervision by staff members. Materials were in good condition. The materials are located at child level, so they are easily accessible to the children.

The preschool classroom uses Creative Curriculum to develop lesson plans and GOLD assessments are completed on the children. The other program rooms use the Dr. Terrie Rose PLAYbook curriculum and a variety of other resources to create lesson plans. Several rooms had binders of lesson plans. Activities are based on themes. Each teacher prepares their own lesson plans. Newsletters are prepared monthly by each room and provided to the parents. A lesson plan was available for review in each room.

The program is using ProCare to complete daily sheets and to communicate with all the parents. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is used in the classrooms to redirect behaviors and meet the needs of the children. There are several visual cues in the classroom to help direct the children.

There was a phone with emergency numbers and the center's phone number and address in each of the classrooms. Emergency fire and tornado procedures and emergency evacuation diagrams were posted by all the main program doors and outdoor exits throughout the center. A daily schedule was posted for each room.

I reviewed documentation of monthly fire and tornado drills. I reviewed documentation of monthly playground inspections. The radon test was completed in December 2024 and is good for two years because the center has a radon mitigation system. Results were within EPA guidelines. The building was originally entirely geothermal, but this was expensive so they are converting to using some fuel burning appliances. No concerns were noted. The carbon monoxide detector is in the hallway. Outlets were protected. The fire marshal inspection occurred on 12/06/24.

The center participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Lunch is prepared by the Howard-Winneshiek School district during the school year. During the summer months the school provides the food items to the childcare center and the cook makes lunch. Beverly O'Brien is the cook. The center prepares breakfast and the morning and afternoon snack for the children. The center dishes food out on the plates for lunch and serves them to the children at the table. Family style is sometimes used for breakfast and snack for the older children. All food is served in the rooms.

The kitchen area has an industrial refrigerator and there is an industrial freezer in the pantry. There were thermometers present. There is a refrigerator in the infant room and thermometers were present. There were two milk coolers and thermometers were present. An industrial dishwasher is used for dishes. The kitchen staff washes the dishes by hand before running the dishes through the dishwasher to sanitize them. Dishes are then allowed to air dry. Food items were stored according to NHSPS guidelines.

The center provides one brand of formula, jar food and cereal to the infants. If parents want a different brand, they provide it. Bottles are returned to the kitchen and put through the dishwasher. Food was stored according to NHSPS guidelines in the room.

Menus are posted in the kitchen and in each of the rooms. The school provides a new lunch menu each month and the center has a six-week rotation of menus for breakfast and snacks. Allergies are confidentially posted.

The center uses bleach and water to sanitize the food tables. All the bleach bottles are labeled as a sanitizer. Ms. Vobr states she would have to check with the staff member who mixes the bleach to see if it is mixed strong enough to be a disinfectant for the changing tables. Currently the bleach bottles labeled as a sanitizer are not strong enough to disinfect the diaper changing tables. A disinfectant must be used on changing tables.

I observed and discussed diaper changing procedures with staff members. In the mobile and immobile infant classrooms, the staff members were only using wipes to clean the smallest infant's hands. The hands must always be washed with soap and water for all ages. If you do not wish to hold the child over the sink to wash hands you can use the three-step method using paper towels. This was corrected prior to me leaving.

Each classroom has access to a bathroom in their room and there are multiple sinks in the classrooms. Handwashing and diaper changing procedures were posted in all the mandated areas.

Infants use cribs to nap. Children start transitioning to cots when they turn one-year-old. The older children use cots to nap.

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The childcare center has two fenced-in outdoor play areas. There is a large naturalistic playground. There is a hill built into this area that has two slides. There is a large sandbox, a rock path and concrete path for riding toys, a stage for the children to perform on, a music center, balance beams, sensory center and a large shade shelter. There are flower and vegetable gardens and trees provide shade. Picnic tables are available.

The second area uses Poly Extruded Matting (PEM) for fall surfacing. The PEM Playground Matting has shredded rubber contained in chambers. This area is divided into two spaces to accommodate a space for infant and toddlers. The area for the older children has climbing equipment with slides and other activities, a sandbox, a stationary bus to sit in, climbing ropes and a balance beam. There is also a grassy area for the children and a picnic table. The area for the infants and toddlers has a treehouse with a slide, pushing toys, rocking toys and a small piece of climbing equipment with slides. Shade is provided by the building, a tree and a shade structure with a tarp. There is also a large multi-purpose room available for indoor activities.

The parent information is located on a bulletin board inside the entrance. The mandatory reporter, childcare consultant and the handbook availability were posted. The license was conspicuously located on the reception desk. A no-smoking sign was posted at the entrance.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The leadership of the program is committed to providing a safe environment for the children. Staff members had terrific interaction with the children in each room. They made the learning environment fun and inviting. Staff members are enthusiastic and it came across in how they taught and interacted with the children. They interacted with the children at their level and offered them choices. They were flexible but maintained a routine for the children. Staff members had great teamwork. They each have jobs and roles within the classrooms and know what to expect from one another. Staff members provided easy to understand and clear directions for the children. They provided the children with praise and a calm environment and used positive redirection when necessary. Staff members change out centers routinely so that children do not get bored. Staff members modeled good manners for the children. They included children in activities and encouraged them to use their imaginations. They provided the children with good handwashing reminders and several of them assisted the children as they washed their hands. Children appeared to enjoy their time at the program.

Ms. Vobr states they currently have three staff members using the TEACH program and two staff members who recently finished the program. There are seven staff members who are on the WAGES program.

The program has an IQ4K level of 2 that expires on 02/28/27.

There are twenty-one staff members with over three years of experience. Ten staff members with over five years of experience.

Staff members have an open-mindedness to attend professional development. Professional development opportunities are offered in-house.

The center has a program emphasis on creating a “people first” culture.

The center has relationships with the community and there are “center offered” events.

The center has been able to keep childcare costs low and provide for their staff to the best of their ability.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
The center received the 2025 Outstanding Organization of the Year Award for their community.

They provide all full time center employees with life insurance and short-term disability free of cost with the option of adding dental, vision, accident and additional life insurance.

The center is offering a Simple IRA plan for all staff members reasonably expected to receive at least 5,000 in compensation for the calendar year and who have received at least 5,000 in compensation during he six months preceding the calendar

year.

The center completed construction during the summer of 2025 to increase nursery and pre-preschool classroom capacity. The licensed capacity increased to 153 children.

The center added time for professional development and self-care into their calendar year.

The center continues to contract with NICC which has enabled them to work as an administrative team and whole team with an organizational psychologist.

The center has a Parent/Teacher Association development for fundraising events: successful Porch Pot and Princess/Super Hero Brunch fundraisers.

The center was a Community Foundation Grant recipient.

GOALS:
To develop an administrative team for sustainability and growth purposes (immediate-currently attempting o work with a four person team).

To continue to work toward better accommodating our school-age group: more feasible space for school-aged children (possibly meeting with architect in March). Attempt to recruit consistent leads to create better quality programming.

Maintain bonuses structure for full-time staff if and when the Howard County Child Care Coalition is unable to attain funds.

Utilize coaching services through CCR&R to better support individual growth and classroom quality (Applied and had first meeting with Alonda in Locos).

Continue to participate in IQ4K.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

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 for the remainder of the licensing period. All DHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period.

The program had a terrific visit. You must find out if the bleach is mixed as a disinfectant and make this change immediately if it is not.

An administrative change is being made to name Katie Polashek as the interim director. She started the role in May 2026. Ms. Polashek has a BA in elementary education and several years of experience in childcare. She will be the director until Alaina O'Connor has enough points to be the director. She is working toward getting 25 hours of training.

Date: 06/30/2026

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**.