Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Sunflower Child Development & Discovery Center

Provider No.: 19264

Address: 902 Commerce Drive, Decorah, IA, 52101

County: Winneshiek

Director's Name: Holly Benda & Daiton Johnson

On-Site Supervisor: Holly Benda & Daiton Johnson

Phone Number: 5633825717

E-Mail: holly.benda@sunflowerchildcare.org

HHS Visit Date: 05/11/2026

Licensing Period: 04/01/2025 to 05/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 02/04/2026

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 4

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

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

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	7:00 AM to 5:30 PM		
Tuesday	7:00 AM to 5:30 PM		
Wednesday	7:00 AM to 5:30 PM		
Thursday	7:00 AM to 5:30 PM		
Friday	7:00 AM to 5:30 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	51	24	80	60	215
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On 05/11/26 I made an unannounced off year licensing visit to Sunflower Child Development Center in Decorah. I met with Holly Benda, the Executive Director. Ms. Benda started with the program in June 2021 and became the director in May 2023. Ms. Benda is NAC certified and an IAAEYC member. Daiton Johnson is the Director of Operations for the center. Ms. Johnson has been with the program since August 2018 and has worked in various rooms during her time at the center. The center employs 85 employees.

Sunflower Child Development Center was started in 1975 and operates out of a free-standing building. They started in a newly constructed childcare building on 06/10/24. The program operates Monday through Friday from 7:00 am until 5:30 pm. The center serves infants through school-aged children and is open year-around. There are currently 139 children enrolled. The center has an IQ4K level 4 that expired on 01/31/28.

The center operates out of the following rooms: three Duckling rooms (birth until approximately 12 months old), two Chipmunk rooms (approximately 12 to 24 months), two Otter rooms (two-year-olds), two Owl rooms (three-year-olds), Fox room (four-year-old preschool) and two Wolves rooms (school-aged). An inspection of each room was completed.

Please be aware that once children turn two years old in the Chipmunk rooms they must be moved up to the Otter room. Children who are under the age of eighteen months old cannot be cared for in the same room as children who are two years old and older.

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

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numbers. The children's birthdays were posted. There is an area for circle time in the rooms for the children two years old and older.

The centers observed on the day of the licensing visit include library, Lego/blocks, table toys, games, puzzles, transportation, computers/Ipads, puppets, Play-Doh, art, dramatic play, listening, 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.

In addition to the centers in the classroom, the center has use of a gym in the center and the use of the Discovery Center. The Discovery Center also has specific hours open to the community. The childcare center and community do not use the Discovery Center at the same time. The Discovery Centr is divided into zones.

There is a toddler area that has a turf surface. There are two small hills made of turf, riding toys with a path, a slide and a large dramatic play area. There are two benches for the children to rest. There is a "splash zone" with several water activities. There is a climbing zone with an obstacle course made of mats and a slide. There is a large Lite Brite Board, a large Etch A Sketch and a large 3D Pin Art Toy. There is also a large Lego table in this area. There is a large playhouse with stairs to a reading area. There are tables and benches for the children to rest.

The Sunflower Child Development Center partners with the Decorah School District to provide the voluntary four-year-old preschool program. The voluntary preschool program meets on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 8:00 am until 1:00 pm. Sally Dougherty was the lead teacher for the voluntary preschool program this year but Josie Guerin was taking over the lead the week of my visit. Ms. Guerin has a master's degree in early childhood education and a BA in elementary education with endorsements in reading, English/language arts and ESL.

The preschool program uses the Creative Curriculum to develop lesson plans and completes the GOLD assessments. Additional resources are also used to create lesson plans, such as Heggerty Phonemic Awareness, Alpharady by Dr. Jean and Alphatales. Activities are planned around studies. The preschool program participates in the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (QPPS). The other rooms use Creative Curriculum and a variety of resources to develop lesson plans. The length of the study depends on the topic and the children's interest. Lesson plans were available for review in every room.

The program uses the ProCare app to communicate with parents. Daily sheets for the children under the age of two-years-old are completed in the ProCare app.

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

I reviewed documentation of monthly fire and tornado drills. I reviewed documentation of monthly playground inspections. The radon test was completed in June 2025 and is good for five years. Results were within EPA guidelines. The fuel burning inspection was completed at the time of installation. A carbon monoxide detector is in the fire system in each room on the ceiling. The fire marshal inspection occurred on 02/04/26.

The program participates in the Farm to Early Childhood Education (F2ECE) program. They have a weekly curriculum for the program that incorporates new foods each month. It also incorporates a weekly fitness program as part of F2ECE.

The center participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). They serve breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack. Shelly Dolley is the cook. She started with the program in November 2022. She has completed the Serv Safe class and has her Certified Board for Dietary Managers (CBDM) certificate. She also has her Professional Nutrition, Diet and Health Program certificate. She has worked in the food service industry for 39 years. She uses a four-week rotation of menus that rotate three times a year, so the menus are seasonal (winter to early spring; summer until Labor Day; and fall until the end of the year). The children eat in their classrooms. They are currently using assisted family style.

The center provides one brand of formula, baby food and cereal to the infants. If parents want a different brand, they must provide it. Bottles are prepared in the room. The parents have the choice of taking the bottles home or leaving them at the center where they are put through the dishwasher. There is a dishwasher in each of the Duckling rooms.

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There is a refrigerator present in each classroom. Thermometers were present in each refrigerator.

The kitchen was observed to be clean and organized. The new building has a spacious and modern kitchen. Menus and allergies were posted. Menus and dietary restrictions are also posted in the rooms. There is a walk-in freezer and refrigerator that have both an external and internal thermometer. The dishes are put through an industrial dishwasher. There are three industrial sinks available to hand wash dishes using the three-step method if necessary. I observed the pantry. Food is kept off the floor and was stored according to the NHSPS guidelines.

The center uses bleach and water to sanitize food tables and Purell Professional Surface Disinfectant to disinfect the changing tables.

I observed and/or discussed diaper changing procedures with staff members and procedures are followed.

There are multiple bathrooms, sinks and changing tables throughout the center. Handwashing and diaper changing procedures were posted in most locations. Post the handwashing procedures near the sink in the bathroom of the Otter 1 classroom and near the sink in the bathroom of the Wolf 2 classroom.

Cribs are used to nap for infants and children who are one year old and older sleep on cots.

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 hung. A no-smoking sign was posted at the entrance. There are community resources in the entrance.

The playground is divided into six fenced areas. There is an area for each age group.

The Duckling playground has turf and a grassy area. There is a small hill made of turf and an activity center. Trees provide shade and there is an umbrella.

The Chipmunk playground has turf and a grassy area. There is a small hill made of turf. There is a small piece of climbing equipment with a slide. There is a music center. Trees provide shade and there is an umbrella.

The Otter playground has turf and a grassy area. There is a bike path for riding toys and a tunnel. There is a piece of climbing equipment with a slide. There is a music center. Trees provide shade.

The Owl playground has turf and a grassy area. There is a piece of climbing equipment with slides and there are steppingstones. There is a music center and a balance beam. Trees provide shade.

The Fox playground has turf and a grassy area. There is a rope climbing structure, merry-go-round, a tunnel and a tire swing. Shade is mostly provided by the building.

The School-Age playground uses rubber mulch for their fall surfacing. There is also a grassy area. There is a piece of climbing equipment with slides and a basketball court. Trees and the building provide shade.

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 sang with the children as they washed their hands. Children appeared to enjoy their time at the program.

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The center has an IQ4K level 4 that expired on 01/31/28.

Ms. Benda states they have consistency across the board. They have weekly meetings with lead teachers and monthly meetings with all staff members.

Ms. Benda states the staff members want to implement and try new things and they work with other rooms to learn and grow.

They close the center for professional development days twice each year. An approved trainer comes to the center to provide the training.

Staff members have "Up and Down" meetings, meaning staff members meet with the classrooms older than them and younger than them to achieve consistency. Staff members have asked to keep this going.

Ms. Benda is an IAEYC member and she has completed the National Administrator Credential (NAC).

The childcare center has Retired Senior Volunteers (RSV) who come to the center weekly.

The program is in a secure building and there are cameras in each of the rooms.

There is information about each teacher outside of the rooms.

Ms. Benda prepares a monthly center-wide newsletter.

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 HHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period.

An administrative change is being made to remove Amy Winter as a director. She is no longer with the program.

An administrative change is being made to change the licensing period end date to 05/01/27. The reason for the change is so I can make the visit at the same time as the Head Start classroom in the building.

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management:
I discussed with Ms. Benda her oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) Understand expectations, 2) managing frustrations, 3) monitor performance. Ms. Benda states she communicates with all staff members about expectations around children's behaviors. She states they discuss "soft hold" of children if a child tries to hurt themselves or others. She states that most staff members have completed PBIS training. Ms. Benda states staff members reach out to her or Ms. Johnson if they are having problems in the classroom. They will take the child for a walk or the child is brought to the office.

Ms. Benda states if staff members are frustrated, they are taught to "tap out" and have another staff member step in to deal with the child. They also come to her and Ms. Johnson. They talk with staff members about "burn out" moments. They took an Introvert and Extrovert Personalities training. They talked about staff members stepping back and sometimes letting children "do their thing". She states they know which rooms are struggling and staff members are good at reporting

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problems. She and Ms. Johnson also have televisions in each of their rooms with the footage of the cameras.

An administrative change is being made to name Daiton Johnson as a co-director. She has been with the center since August 2018 and has been in an administrative role for many years.

Date: 06/15/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Becky Frost

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**.