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 S Ave , Decorah, IA, 52101

County: Winneshiek

Director's Name: Rachael Buresh

On-Site Supervisor: Jane Busch

Phone Number: 5633826491

E-Mail: neimontessori@gmail.com

HHS Visit Date: 09/24/2025

Licensing Period: 10/01/2024 to 10/01/2026

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 11/28/2023

Comments: Compliance on 01/05/24

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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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 09/24/25 I made an unannounced off year 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). Faith Robinson is the Assistant Head of School. Faith Robinson has a BA in art education.

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 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.

The center operates out of a free-standing building. They started in their new location in January 2024. 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 between the Children's House classroom and the after-school program. 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

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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 method 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.

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 program for use by the children. There is one toilet and one sink in each bathroom. Handwashing procedures were posted. There is one sink in the classroom that is primarily used for dishes. Children were observed washing their hands at this sink. Post handwashing procedures neat the sink. 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 Guide's offices. Emergency fire and tornado procedures and evacuation diagrams were posted near most of the program doors and outdoor exits in the program. Please post the evacuation diagrams near the door in the Children's House classroom that leads to the main entrance. A daily schedule was posted.

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.

The annual fuel burning inspection was completed and no concerns were noted. A carbon monoxide detector was on site in the Children's House classroom near the fire extinguisher. Outlets were protected. The fire marshal inspection occurred on 11/28/23, with compliance on 01/05/24.

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 and thermometers were present. 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 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. A no-smoking sign was posted at the entrance.

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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.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

This is an extraordinary and unique program that I always enjoy visiting. Staff members were observed moving around the classroom. Ms. Vilardo and Ms. Lenehan were observed working one on one with students. Explaining new works or reviewing works the children have used before. They were observed interacting at the children's level. They read to the children, cut shapes out of paper with a child to discuss shapes while helping her hoe to use scissors. Staff members suggest works and offer to help them with works. Being flexible and teaching the children at their own pace. Staff members are enthusiastic and they get the children excited about what they do. Staff members modeled good manners. They thanked the children for being patient. They had good handwashing reminders. Staff members had great teamwork.

The program has an IQ4K level of 1 that expires on 05/31/26.

The program received Montessori accreditation in 2024 and they are accredited with the state of Iowa as a school.

The program received the Leadership Award from National School Choice week in 2025.

Children who are in kindergarten or older can ride the bus to and from school.

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

Ms. Buresh states they are fortunate that the program has staff longevity.

Ms. Buresh states they have well educated staff members that are dedicated to the Montessori method.

Ms. Buresh states they have a full school with a waiting list. The program has grown.

Ms. Buresh states the program has more visibility in the community. The community is more invested in the program.

Ms. Buresh states they have great families who are invested in the program.

Ms. Buresh states they have a strong group of volunteers.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

N/A

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.

I met with Ms. Buresh following my observations in the classroom. The program had a terrific visit.

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Date: 09/26/2025

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**.