Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Cougar's Den Daycare & Preschool

Provider No.: 16172

Address: 413 State ST, Ackley, IA, 50601

County: Hardin

Director's Name: Amy Weichers

On-Site Supervisor: Sharese Willems

Phone Number: 6418472699

E-Mail: aweichers@agwsr.org

HHS Visit Date: 05/05/2026

Licensing Period: 08/01/2025 to 08/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 10/21/2024

Comments: Inspection date 10-21-24 and compliance on 01-06-25

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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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Tuesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Wednesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Thursday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Friday	6:00 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	8	24	58	30	120
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

An unannounced annual visit was made to Cougar's Den Day Care & Preschool in Ackley on 05-05-26 where I met with the center director Amy Weichers. Amy is well qualified for the position with extensive experience and on-going training in early childhood care. Amy started with the center when it opened in 2003 and worked at two previous child care programs prior to starting with this center. The center operates out of a free standing building that was designed to be a child care center. The center is over seen by the school board and an independent board. The program provides daycare and preschool programming to infants through school-aged children, and the school district also operates a formal preschool class during the school year. The preschool programming includes a three year old preschool program operated by the daycare, and a four year-old preschool program operated under the Department of Education oversight. There are approximately 75 children enrolled in the program served by 10 teachers. All aspects of the program subject to Licensing Standards were reviewed.

The general layout and design of the facilities and classrooms remains the same as observed in prior years. The program operates out of several classrooms determined by age groups. Each classroom was observed to be clean with no concerns noted due to maintenance or design. Each classroom has secondary egress from the room with several providing direct access to the outdoors. All emergency exits from programming spaces were clear of obstruction and opened freely and easily. One issue that was noted was that the emergency exit of the school age room did have a safety strap used to secure cabinets from access by children. While the room was not in use, and the strap was not engaged it was discussed with Amy that it cannot be engaged when the program is in operation and should be removed. The facility has a basement space which is used as a tornado shelter and for storage. Each classroom with the exception of the infant room has restroom facilities located just off the classroom space so that the children do not need to leave the room. Changing stations are present in the

infant room, and other classrooms where children may need diaper changes. Each classroom has sinks in the room to facilitate hand washing. Each room has windows along the exterior walls that provide ample natural light, a view of the outdoors, and ventilation. The infant room is divided by a counter space and mobile gate structures. This has been used to define one side for non-mobile infants, and one for mobile infants, but at the time of the current visit was used more for primary programming, and sleeping. Each room is divided into activity centers through the placement of furniture, and play structures that are arranged so as not to create any blind areas.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

Good interactions were observed on the day of my visit. A copy of the daily schedule and planned curriculum was posted for each classroom. Each teacher was observed to be presenting the planned curriculum. This included classes engaging in teacher lead "circle time" where the class reviewed the date, weather, number/letter/shape concepts, identified student helper jobs, and talked about the plan for the day. Other activities included small group art crafts, and self directed center play. The center uses proactive behavior management approaches such as transition cues to get the children's attention, reminders of expected behavior, and recognition of positive behaviors. All interactions were observed to be positive with teachers presenting an upbeat and energetic attitude, or calm and nurturing response with upset children depending on the circumstances. Ratio was maintained in each room as required by age

Good health and safety practices were observed during the time of my visit. I was able to observe a diaper change from a distance and staff did follow proper changing procedures. Good hand washing practices were observed with the staff ensuring that they and the children washed their hands as needed and in an effective manner. The staff in the infant room did inquire about handwashing for younger infants and options for those that were difficult to hold. It was reviewed that staff could get a paper towel wet with soap and use that to wash infants hands while they remain on the changing station and using another wet towel to rinse. Children with identified heath and allergies had response plans in place which were available in the children's files, and posted in the classrooms. Over the counter medications were properly stored and labeled. First aid kits are present in each classroom, and additional supplies in the office. While the individual kits in the classrooms were limited with regard to supplies present taken as a whole the center did have materials necessary to address most common first aid needs. Chemical cleaners, purses, and other items that could pose a risk to children are stored in areas where they are not accessible to children. Safe sleep practices were observed for infants under 1 year of age. Appropriate bedding was available for all cribs and cots. Good feeding position was observed with children being held or seated in an upright position.

The playground area remains the same as in prior visits being separated into two areas with one for infants and toddlers, and one for preschool and school age children. The playground is fenced to both enclose the playground spaces and to separate the preschool and toddler areas. Several retention clips used to secure the fencing to the support poles were missing allowing the fence to flex away from the post creating an entrapment risk. Fall surfacing in both playground areas consists of a unitary foam system. A large mature tree provides ample shade. The equipment was generally observed to be in good repair however there were anchor bolts that were missing and others that were loose on the south discharging slide of the climbing structure of the preschool/school age playground. Some of the other equipment such as a residential grade dramatic play structure and some other toys were observed to be nearing or had reached the end of their useful life and should be replaced.

The center has a full kitchen and meals are prepared on-site. Good food storage and handling practices were observed in the kitchen and classrooms. Both refrigerated and dry pantry food items were properly stored and labeled. Staff did wash their hands before handling or serving food items. A copy of the menu is posted and provides a good variety of nutritious meal options. The center uses a 5 week menu rotation. Meals are served in the classrooms and staff do pre-portion the meals for the children. While the teachers did not eat with the children supervision is provided at the tables.

In reviewing administrative records all required notices for No Smoking, License Certificate, Consultant Contact, and Mandatory Abuse Reporting were posted in an area readily accessible and visible parents and visitors. Other required postings for emergency evacuation, emergency numbers, handwashing, diapering, daily schedule, curriculum, and menu were also present. A random sample of 15% of child files were selected for review and all child files contained all required information. The review of staff file again included a random sample of 20% of files all of which were found to contain all required information. All required inspection logs and certificates were current and available. The parent handbook was reviewed and several required written policies were missing or needed to be expanded following the most recent revision.

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3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

109.4(1): Written policies on: Enrollment and discharge. Field trips and non-center activities. Discipline/Behavior/Biting. Nutrition. Health and safety policies. Transportation if applicable. Assurance people do not have unauthorized access to children at the center. Protecting children's confidentiality.
-- Required written policies were missing or needed to be expanded to include all elements for Field Trips, Transportation, Health & Safety (major/minor injury, handwashing, safe sleep), Incident Reporting, Curriculum, Staff Orientation/Training, Confidentiality, Emergency Plans

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
-- The climbing structure south facing slide chute had only 1 functional anchor bolt in place to secure the slide to the platform. The fence had several missing retention clips especially along the west edge which allows the fence to flex away from the poles creating a significant entrapment risk. -- 2ND YEAR CITED. -- Partial Correction

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

A list of required written policies and suggestions for implementation was provided.

A call was received from Amy on 05-06-26 that the center maintenance had tightened/replaced loose missing hardware to secure the slide chute to the platform. Maintenance is still needed for the fencing.

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.

6. ADDENDUMS:

- Addendum1: Updated handbook policies were received on 05-18-26.

This Addendum is approved by supervisor on 5/22/2026 3:31:04 PM

Date: 05/06/2026

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**.