Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Cherokee Head Start

Provider No.: 30282

Address: 1006 N Roosevelt St, Cherokee, IA, 51012

County: Cherokee

Director's Name: Kendra Rensink

On-Site Supervisor: Larae Wendt

Phone Number: 7122255849

E-Mail: krensink@midsioux.org

HHS Visit Date: 03/03/2026

Licensing Period: 04/01/2025 to 03/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 03/02/2026

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

- [X] Accrediation — Comments: IQ4K level 3

Program Duration:

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

Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday		8:00 AM to 3:00 PM	
Monday		8:00 AM to 3:00 PM	
Tuesday		8:00 AM to 3:00 PM	
Wednesday		8:00 AM to 3:00 PM	
Thursday		8:00 AM to 3:00 PM	
Friday		8:00 AM to 1:00 PM	
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General			40		40
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On March 3, 2026, I completed an unannounced visit at the Cherokee Head Start program. Upon arrival, I met with Lead Teacher Kara Shannon. Ms. Shannon holds an associate's degree in Early Childhood Education, a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and has previous experience as a program director. LaRae Wendte was not present during the visit, as she was conducting scheduled home visits with families of children enrolled in the program. Ms. Wendte holds a degree in Elementary Education and has over 30 years of experience working with children.

The building is used specifically for the Head Start program. The Early Head Start classroom operates Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The preschool classroom operates Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and on Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The program serves children ages three to five years.

I observed all areas of the center, including classrooms, activities, nutrition practices, health and safety procedures, playground, and administrative review.

There are 38 children enrolled at this program and 16 at the time of my visit. I observed the preschool classrooms. The environment included a wide variety of visual learning materials such as colors, shapes, the five senses, a globe, a picture schedule, job chart, children's artwork, and the alphabet. Both classrooms had numerous completed art projects displayed. The rooms were bright, colorful, and well organized, with daily schedules and menus clearly posted.

The center utilizes the HighScope Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes active, hands-on learning in which children explore materials and engage in meaningful experiences supported by teachers. It incorporates consistent routines, including plan-do-review, small-group and large-group times, and intentional adult-child interactions designed to build independence,

critical thinking, and social-emotional skills. Teachers observe and document children's development to individualize instruction in alignment with HighScope's key developmental indicators.

The program has a well-organized room arrangement that includes clearly defined centers for free play. Each center contains descriptions outlining the specific skills children develop through that type of play. One center includes dolls labeled with different emotions to help children recognize and express feelings. The program also maintains a thorough list indicating which children are toilet training or wearing diapers, which supports staff in meeting each child's individual care needs.

I observed positive, developmentally appropriate interaction between staff and children during free-choice time. Children were offered a variety of activity options, and staff supported them in making independent choices. Staff remained engaged, attentive, and actively involved in the learning process. Classroom management was strong. Staff interacted with children in a warm, supportive manner and used redirection effectively and consistently when needed. Children responded well to staff guidance and remained engaged in their chosen activities, contributing to a calm and productive learning atmosphere.

Menu items were posted, and meals follow CACFP nutritional guidelines. The kitchen was clean, organized, and well maintained. Food-storage practices were appropriate, with dated items and sealed containers used after opening. Bathrooms were clean and had visual hand-washing directions posted for children. Medication is stored in a locked container or placed out of children's reach, and the center follows proper medication-administration procedures.

Tables were sanitized prior to meals. The first-aid kit was fully stocked and appropriate for treating minor injuries. Fire and tornado drills are documented each month. Radon testing has been completed, and results remain within the normal range. A functioning carbon monoxide detector is present, and furnace inspections have been completed as required. All program areas appeared clean, safe, and well maintained.

The center has a large, fenced-in playground with appropriate equipment. The playground surface is poured rubber, providing adequate fall protection. A multi-purpose room is also available and is used for indoor play, parent meetings, staff training, and small-group activities. Mid-Sioux Opportunity transports children to and from the program using a small bus. Children are buckled into their seats during transport, and appropriate transportation-safety practices are followed.

Goals for this center is to increase their IQ4K certification level.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The Center has a IQ4K rating of 3. An IQ4K rating reflects a program's commitment to quality beyond basic licensing standards. A Level 3 rating demonstrates that the center has strengthened practices in areas such as learning environments, staff training, curriculum, health and safety, nutrition, and family engagement. Programs with an IQ4K rating benefit from clearer guidance on continuous improvement, increased recognition of quality within the community, and access to professional development supports. Families also benefit by having reliable, structured information about the program's quality, helping them make informed decisions about childcare.

Staff demonstrate strong classroom-management skills and interact positively with the children in their care. They maintain a supportive, consistent approach and create an environment where children feel engaged and secure.

The center engages families by conducting home visits, which help strengthen relationships and bridge the gap between home and school. These visits allow staff to better understand each child's home environment and support consistent communication with families.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

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

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

I discussed with Kara their oversight of behavior management relating to helping childcare staff: 1) Understanding Expectations, 2) managing frustrations, 3) monitor performance:

Kara demonstrated a strong understanding of how to support staff when they become frustrated by challenging behaviors in the classroom. Staff work collaboratively as a team and recognize that there are times when children may struggle with behavior or be difficult to redirect. In these situations, staff take a step back, focus on maintaining safety, and work to de-escalate the situation without allowing the negative behavior to become the central focus. Staff are trained in PBIS practices, which support consistent, positive approaches to behavior guidance.

A full license is recommended at this time.

At least one visit will be made to the center during the next year.

Date: 03/04/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Leann Steinhauer

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**.