Iowa Department of Human Services
CHILD CARE CENTER EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE

Name of Center: Little Comets Childcare **Enrollment:** 42 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 52077

Street: 201 N Wilhelm ST **City:** Conrad Iowa **Zip** 50621 **County:** Grundy

Mailing Address: PO Box 455, Conrad, IA, 50621

Director's Name: Erin Cross **Phone Number:** 641-366-3041

On-Site Supervisor(s): **E-Mail:** lilcometschildcare@gmail.com

Date(s) of Visit: 03-18-2025

X **Licensing Visit** X **Unannounced Visit** **Off Year Visit** **Administrative Change**

LICENSING VISITS

New Application X **Re-Application** **NA**

Signed Application (470-0722) Received X **Yes** **No** **NA** **Date Signed:** 02-25-2025

FIRE INSPECTION X **State** **Local** **NA** **Is Fire Inspection Approved?** X **Yes** **No** **NA**

Date Inspected: 05-31-2022

Comments : The approved inspection was issued under the previous ownership of the center however confirmation was received from the fire marshal that given there was no change in the functional use of the building, no construction/renovation, and no change in the room occupancies of the center that the prior certificate of inspection would remain valid for the change of ownership.

LICENSE TYPE: X **Child Care** **Preschool (ages 3-5 meets three hours or less per day)**

Financial Type: Profit X Non-Profit NA

Accredition: Accredited NAEYC NSACA Other X NA

Program Serves: X Infants (0-23 mo.) X 2 Years X Preschool-Age X School-Age

Get-Well Evening Care Special Needs

SCHEDULE: X Year-round School-Year Summer Only

HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Age	Capacity
General	14	12	17	11	54
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 04-01-2025 to 04-01-2027
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Raymond Salsbury **Date:** 03-26-2025

I. IF CURRENT LICENSE IS PROVISIONAL, IDENTIFY THE CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

An unannounced licensing visit was made to the center on 03-18-25 where I met with the center Erin Cross. Erin is well qualified for the position based on her experience and training. The center was previously operated as a for profit program under private ownership but will now be operated under a board of directors as a non-profit program. The program is located in a free standing building in Conrad that was designed as a daycare. The center provides full range programming for infants through school age children. There are currently 42 children enrolled in the center served by 8 staff. All aspects of the program subject to licensing standards were reviewed.

The general layout and design of the center remains the same as in prior visits. The center has 4 primary classrooms established by age groups for infants, 2 year olds, preschool, and school age children. There is also a large central corridor area which had been used for additional programming space in the past and could be used for summer over-flow programming for school age children if needed. Each classroom has secondary exits providing direct access to the outdoors. All designated emergency exits were maintained so that they are clear of obstruction, and opened easily and freely though an outdoor play structure was observed to be located in front of one emergency exit from the central corridor area. Erin stated that the structure is not stored in that location and suggested that it may have been blown there by the wind. One other issue that was noted was that the latch mechanism for the preschool room was observed to have loose hardware allowing it to move and while it was functional it does need to be repaired. Each room has windows along the exterior walls that provide ample natural light, a view of the outdoors, and ventilation. Each room has sinks available in the classroom to facilitate hand washing. Pass through restrooms are located between the infant and preschool rooms, and the toddler and school age rooms with direct access from each room. Each restroom has two toilets present. A third restroom is located off the central corridor area. Each room has additional sinks present in the room to facilitate hand washing. The infant room does have a changing station present which is separated from the rest of the room through the use of a mobile fence and gate structure, and a changing station is also present in the 2 year old classroom. Diapering procedure postings were not present by either station and do need to be reposted. Each room has an open floor plan design that does not create any blind areas. The preschool room has an elevated play area above low cabinets where cots are stored. Each room is divided into activity centers through the use of shelving, play structures, and furniture that was arranged so as not to create any blind areas.

Each classroom had a copy of the daily schedule and planned curriculum posted. The materials that were present were generally supportive of the planned curriculum and appropriate to the ages of the children in the room, but there were some items with small parts in the two year old classroom. Items that are smaller than, or have parts that can break off which are less than 1 1/4 inches in diameter and 2 1/4 inches in length are considered choking hazards and need to be removed from classrooms with children under 3 years of age. The curriculum plan was more relaxed due to Spring Break but the teachers did continue to move the children through activity options such as self-directed center play, large group craft activities, and music/movement during the time of the visit. Engagement levels did vary by classroom with some providing more observational supervision, and others being more engaged. Good behavior management practices were observed with one example being in the preschool room where one child appeared to be having some anxiety related behavior, and other children having some minor conflict. The teacher responded to each situation well with talking with the children and helping them identify options that could help them resolve their issues.

The center does have established health and safety policies but some practices need to be reviewed such as handwashing practices. During the visit while in the 2 year old classroom the staff did wash the children's hands and have them sit at the table while waiting for lunch. During this time the meal service was delayed and as a result a couple of the children did get up and go play. When the meal did arrive those children did not re-wash their hands prior to eating. In addition while I was not able to observe a diaper change the staff were able to describe the procedures they follow and identified that they do not routinely wash the children's hands following diapering, but sometimes they will use a diaper wipe. It was reviewed that children must have their hands washed following every diaper change. It was further reviewed that if it is not possible to wash them at the sink with soap and running water they could use a paper towel or cloth with soap on it to wash the child's hands but that diaper wipes were not acceptable alternative as they have no detergents in them. Each classroom maintains a first aid kit in the classrooms, and the center does have a large stocked kit and additional supplies which is maintained by a commercial vending service. Purses, chemical cleaners, and other items that can pose a safety risk to children were stored in areas where they are not accessible to children. Medications were properly labeled and stored, and for those children taking medications documentation was present. Safe Sleep practices were followed for children under 1 year of age. Older children made use of cots, and proper bedding was present for all cribs and cots.

The center has a full kitchen and meals are prepared on-site. A copy of the menu was posted and contained a good variety of items that meet nutritional guidelines for CACFP requirements. The kitchen was observed to be clean with no evidence of insect or rodent infestation but it was noted that a large folded cardboard box was stored next to the stove, and the exhaust vent filters appeared to need to be cleaned. While neither was a significant concern both are examples of the need to develop cleaning routines for elements that may not be part of regular daily practice. Good food storage practices were observed with thermometers in refrigerators, however the thermometer in the infant room refrigerator showed a temperature of more than 45 deg. F. on the day of the first visit. This was following the period of lunch service and it may have been due to staff accessing the unit but the center will need to monitor the unit and should complete a temperature log to ensure that proper cold holding temperatures are being maintained. Meals are served in classrooms and good food handling and service practices were observed. Meals were pre-portioned in the kitchen and transported to classrooms in covered containers. The meal consisted of cheese bread, mixed vegetables, mixed fruit, and milk. Items such as grapes in the mixed fruit had been cut for younger children so as to be bite sized not to create disc shaped pieces. While the teachers did not eat with the children supervision was provided at the tables.

The center playground is fully fenced and divided into two areas by additional fencing to define a side for toddlers, and a side for preschool and school age children. Several retention clips used to secure the fence to the support poles were broken/missing and need to be replaced. The toddler playground area contains open grassy areas, a paved riding track, climbing equipment, and other play items. Rubber mulch is used for fall surfacing beneath climbing structures. There were a couple small residential grade slides that were not placed over fall surfacing and these need to be moved to an area with appropriate fall surfacing, or removed from the playground. The school age playground area makes use of rubber mulch beneath some equipment, and foam tiles for fall surfacing beneath other equipment. It has been previously identified that the foam tiles are curling and separating at the edges indicating that they are nearing the end of their useful life and the center will need to consider replacement options. both areas had sufficient depth of material for the rubber mulch. In addition to the climbing structures other toys and equipment were present. Shade structures have been built over play areas in both playgrounds. The edges of the pavement has been painted to clearly delineate the transition points.

In reviewing administrative records all required notices were posted in an area readily accessible to parents and visitors. A random selection of child and staff files were reviewed and compared to the self-audits completed by the center which were found to be accurate. With regard to child files the self-audit identified that 5 needed an updated physical. One issue that was reviewed was with regard to a child with an identified developmental/behavioral issue that while not requiring a response plan is a situation where the center should request information from the parents given that it was identified they were aware of other services the child was working with. This would allow the center to maintain consistency with practices that are being recommended or implemented in other settings for children such as from specific service providers, or school programs. With regard to employee files the self-audit was again found to be accurate but each reviewed file had at least one issue such as certificates that had just recently expired, documentation not being on required forms, or incomplete documentation such as with background checks that had been initiated and identified immediate results were not available but the center had not returned to obtain the final results confirmation. It was discussed that the center would need to review all staff files and obtain updated information for those that were expired or incomplete. All inspection logs and certificates were available but it was noted that emergency drills for fire and tornado were not completed and/or documented monthly as required for August-December of 2024, or January & February 2025. All other inspection logs were current. The center does have a Radon mitigation system and renewed testing had been completed to ensure that system was working properly.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

The center has completed the transition to becoming a non-profit program. This will allow the center to qualify for and access more programs, grants, and other options for support. The transition to having a new basis of management and

oversight was well managed such that there was no disrupt to services or the consistency of the programming provided.

Erin did report that the center is looking at options to update the outdoor playground space. Erin identified that she is taking Center Director courses through Hawkeye Community College and as part of that program she is working on a project of the playground redesign.

IV. IDENTIFY THE ASPECTS OF OPERATION THAT FALL BELOW THE STANDARDS REVIEWED:

109.12(5)b: Infants diapered in a sanitary manner as needed in central diapering area.One changing table for every 15 infants/toddlers needing diaper changes.Diapering, sanitation, and handwashing procedures posted and implemented in central diapering area.
Additional concerns: Diapering procedures postings were not present by all changing stations as required. Staff reported that they do not routinely wash all children's hands following diapering, will make use of baby wipes as an alternative to hand washing.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

A full license is recommended 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.

*Note: If you are the Child Care Center Director and you feel something is unclear or unjustly cited, please contact your DHS Licensing Consultant to discuss the issue. The child care director may also send a response which will be placed in the licensing file.

*Note: If you are a member of the general public, there may be additional information contained in the public file. You may contact the DHS Licensing Consultant to inquire.