Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Heartland Child Development Center

Provider No.: 7218

Address: 710 1st AVE, Council Bluffs, IA, 51501

County: Pottawattamie

Director's Name: Merilee Mescher and Tonya Jensen

On-Site Supervisor:

Phone Number: 7122561877

E-Mail: heartlandchilddev@outlook.com

HHS Visit Date: 04/07/2026

Licensing Period: 07/01/2026 to 07/01/2028

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 10/29/2025

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 3

- [ ] 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 5:15 PM		
Tuesday	7:00 AM to 5:15 PM		
Wednesday	7:00 AM to 5:15 PM		
Thursday	7:00 AM to 5:15 PM		
Friday	7:00 AM to 5:15 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	15	45	22	90
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

An unannounced licensing visit was made to Heartland Child Development Center on 4/7/26. Merilee Mescher and Tonya Jensen are co-owners and co-directors of the center. Kristen Ettleman is an assistant director and she is in charge when Merilee and Tonya are gone. I met with Kristen and Merilee during my licensing visit. Merilee and Tonya opened their center at this location in June 2008. They have been directors in child care for many years. Merilee has an Associate's Degree in Business. Tonya has her Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Development. Merilee and Tonya have their National Administrator Credential (NAC) and CDA's. Kristen has an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Development and NAC. The program provides child care to infants to school age children including preschool and a full day summer program for school age children. Sixty children are enrolled and fifty-three were present at the time of my visit. The center is a one-story commercial building in a mixed residential and business area.

Observation of rooms:
Each room has a fun variety of age and developmentally appropriate equipment and toys. All rooms were in ratio. There are five programming rooms: infant room, toddler room for one-year-olds, Beginning Preschool for two-year-olds, Preschool for three-year-olds, and Pre-K for four- and five-year-olds. School age children only attend during the summer. Daily sheets looked good; they are on the Playground child care app. Tonya provides the theme and Kristen reviews the lesson plans that the teachers in each room prepare. Daily themes with fun, hands-on, educational learning experiences are provided daily. The current theme is Summer. Staff blend Iowa Early Learning Standards, Creative Curriculum, and Montessori Curriculum to create the lesson plans. Many of the children were having nap time during my visit. Staff had excellent interactions with the children; they were positive and attentive to the needs of the children.

Nutrition:

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The center has a nutrition coordinator and meals are prepared onsite. The center provides breakfast, morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack. Monthly menus are posted. During the summer the center participates in the free lunch program for preschool and kindergarten children. Proper food storage was not observed. After opening, all food must be sealed in an airtight container. I observed crackers not being sealed in an airtight container. Each refrigerator/freezer had thermometers. The center is on the federal food program.

Health and safety:
Monthly fire and tornado drills are practiced and documented. Three radon tests were completed in February 2026 and all were in the acceptable range. Radon testing is due every five years if the readings are below 4.0 pCi/L. The annual fuel burning inspection was conducted on 2/25/26 and it was reported the equipment was functioning properly. Purell Surface is used for sanitizing and disinfecting. The three-step bottle procedure is followed, 1. Soap/water for cleaning, 2. Water for rinsing, and 3. Your EPA and child care approved product for sanitizing and disinfecting. Three staff members are medication certified. Medication procedures are followed if a child is prescribed medication. One child has an EpiPen. It is stored in an unlocked bag that is out of reach of the children. Large plastic bags are used to put the children's knapsacks in. Staff will start putting the children's coats and other personal belongings in plastic bags to reduce the risk of infestation and transmission of illnesses. Knapsacks are sent home weekly with the parents to be washed.

Playground:
The center has a fenced playground. Monthly playground safety checks are completed. The playground has climbing structures, slides, riding toys, balls, and sandboxes. The center would like to renovate the playground and has applied for grants to help with the renovations.

Transportation:
The center doesn't provide daily transportation services.

Administrative records:
Eight children's files were read. None had permission to secure emergency care in the event a parent could not be reached. One child did not have a dentist listed, one child did not have a current physical exam, and two children's files had only the parents listed as the emergency contacts and did not provide a backup in case the parents could not be contacted. Three staff files were read and were in excellent order. The center uses the Playground App. The center is IQ4K Level 3.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

Merilee, Tonya, and Kristen make an excellent team. They have a wealth of early child care experience and knowledge. They are active with AEYC and a directors group coordinated through Child Care Resource & Referral. Kristen is working on receiving certification in play therapy. The center provides quality child care services and is a wonderful resource for the community. Staff have excellent interactions with the children; they are positive and attentive to the needs of the children. The center participates in IQ4K Level 3. The center has fundraising events throughout the year including a soup and chili cookoff with a silent auction and they sell chocolate bars. A monthly newsletter is provided to families. There is a weekly newsletter for the staff. The center uses the Playground child care app. They post the menu, calendar, daily sheets, newsletter, etc. on the app. The center receives grants for equipment, etc. The center replaced the cement sidewalk in front of the building in the fall of 2024. Merilee and Kristen also identified their strengths as having an educated staff, staff longevity, they are a nonprofit center, and they have a supportive board. All staff are able to attend the NAEYC national conference every few years if they want to go. Some staff serve on community boards in the area. The center participates in WAGE$ and TEACH programs.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

109.9(2)d: All files contain sufficient information and authorization to allow the center to secure emergency medical and dental services at any time child is in center's care. Eight children's files were read. None had permission to secure emergency medical and dental care in the event a parent could not be reached. One child did not have a dentist listed, one child did not have a current physical exam, and two children's files had only the parents listed as the emergency contacts and did not provide a backup in case the parents could not be contacted.

109.13(5)b: Sanitary and safe methods in food preparation, serving, and storage sufficient to prevent transmission of disease,

infestation, and spoilage are followed. Staff preparing food that have injuries on hands wear protective gloves. Staff serving food use clean serving utensils and have clean hands/wear protective gloves. Food must be served in an airtight container after opening.

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

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

A full license is recommended for 7/1/26 to 7/1/28.

Targeted Assessment Behavior Management
I discussed with Merilee and Kristen their oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1. Understand expectations, 2. Managing frustrations, 3. Monitor performance. Merilee said they have zero tolerance for staff putting hands on children. She feels they hire above average staff. They have in-house orientation with an extensive behavioral plan. If a child is having behavioral issues, they ask the parents for an intervention with AEA or ask CCR&R for behavioral assistance. By next year, 40% of their staff will be trained in PBIS. The center has cameras so they can see most rooms. There is only one room they can't see from the office nor can be seen on the cameras. Most of their staff have a degree or credentials. Kristen has almost completed her play therapy certification.

Date: 04/09/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Tausha Bottorff

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**.