Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Essential Montessori

Provider No.: 25044

Address: 1350 Blairs Ferry Rd Ste A, Hiawatha, IA, 52233

County: Linn

Director's Name: Constance "Connie" Craft

On-Site Supervisor: Constance "Connie" Craft

Phone Number: 3193783100

E-Mail: essential-montessori@hotmail.com

HHS Visit Date: 09/22/2025

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

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 03/10/2025

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

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

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Program Population Served:

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General		2	13	5	20
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

Essential Montessori has been a part of the Hiawatha area community since 1992. The program is located in the back of a small building. Owner and combined directress/on-site supervisor of Essential Montessori is Constance "Connie" Craft. Ms. Craft has an AA degree and over 30 years of experience in the Montessori primary classroom.

On 9/22/2025, building, grounds and program space were observed to all be in good repair. The classroom was found to be pristine, spacious, and highly organized allowing much natural light into the learning environment. Restrooms with hand washing facilities are enclosed in the classroom that serves up to a total of 20 children at any given time. The classroom was observed to be fully equipped with specifically designed Montessori materials that are hands-on, self-correcting, and multi-sensorial. Materials were found to be arranged in a purposeful manner and easily accessible to the children. During the month of this license visit, areas of study have included insects, fresh apple pie, late summer produce, nocturnal animals and butterflies. On 9/22/2025, staff were observed warmly greeting each child and family as they arrived for the afternoon work cycle and events. Afternoon activities were found to include lessons on nocturnal animals with unique nesting materials, the parts of a horse, free drawing of self and others, counting and pattern transferring, phonics work and social graces of snack rituals. On 9/22/2025, staff were observed to be in ratio and actively engaged with the children. Children appeared comfortable with staff and to be enjoying their experiences.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The mission of Essential Montessori is "...to assist at that wonderful beginning for your child in the school setting. Education of the young person involves a careful approach to simultaneously guide progress through emotional, social, and academic areas. Each area is equally important, and a Montessori environment which is carefully prepared and administered by experienced personnel can benefit your child."

Essential Montessori has the following website for families to learn more about the program: https://www.essential-montessori.com/.

As of 9/22/2025, the program is celebrating an impressive 33 years of business! Owner and combined directress/on-site supervisor Connie Craft is a local entrepreneur offering a small, personal Montessori program to the local community. Ms. Craft continues to maintain administrative items in a confidential manner. Ms. Craft remains knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as her own program's policies and procedures. Since the last review, the program has obtained a new assistant staff who has previous licensed childcare experience.

On 9/22/2025, Essential Montessori was again found to be maintaining required postings, maintaining a parent-staff-program information center, utilizing technological communication resources, and offering family programming activities.

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Ms. Craft continues to complete an inspiring monthly newsletter for families with detailed program information. The program also hosts various family events throughout the schoolyear including conferences and seasonal celebrations. The philosophy of Essential Montessori is based on the teaching of Dr. Maria Montessori. The main purpose of this program is "...to provide a carefully planned, stimulating environment which will help the child develop an excellent foundation for creative learning." Curriculum is enriched by the Montessori Materials that support the child's development in the following areas: practical life, sensorial, language, math, geography, art, science, foreign language, music, peace, and grace and courtesy. Work cycles and materials are regularly rotated to encourage child growth and challenge skill levels. Ms. Craft discussed how the work cycles also incorporate enrichment activities including but not limited to cooking, crafts, exploration and social graces (e.g. tea time). The outdoor extension of the indoor classroom continues to include a stage with pergola and natural seating, seasonal gardens/foliage, and nature exploring areas including a squirrel watching feeding station. On the day of the monitoring visit, evidence of still budding flowers and late spring-summer fresh produce (e.g. tomatoes, cucumbers) was found in the program's outdoor garden bed. Ms. Craft discussed how her quality program promotes a peaceful engaging learning environment. This was further supported by the butterflies and a hummingbird milling about the outdoor area on 9/22/2025.

Essential Montessori continues to have and update as needed policies and procedures that include those for safety, daily health checks, hand washing, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. On 9/22/2025, Ms. Craft acknowledged how their program helps ensure the children's space is sanitary and hazard free each day by following the policies and procedures. Ms. Craft also talked about the building owner's responsibilities related to building and ground conditions.

Essential Montessori has emergency plans, policies, and procedures which are regularly reviewed and updated as needed. Essential Montessori has successfully navigated through historic Linn County flooding events, January 2019 Polar Vortex, 2019 health (covid-19) pandemic, 8/10/20 Derecho Storm, 2021 food supply issues, air quality alerts (2013, 2015) and 7/19/24 global technology outage.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

109.6(4)c: Center repeats Iowa record checks at a minimum of every two years or when aware of additional child abuse or criminal history that occurs.

109.6(4)d: Center repeats national criminal history checks at a minimum of every four years or when aware of additional history that occurs.

109.9(1)b: All files contain a pre-employment physical exam report completed within six months prior to hire and at least every three years. Physical exams shall be documented on form 470-5152, Child Care Provider Physical Examination Report.

109.9(1)c: All files contain documentation to indicate that ongoing staff training requirements are met, including current certifications in first aid/CPR and mandatory child abuse training.

109.9(2)h: Signed and dated valid Certificate of Immunization, Certificate of Immunization Exemption, or Provisional Certificate of Immunization, provided by the department must be on file for each child enrolled as required by Iowa Administrative Code 641—7.

109.10(13)b: Emergency instructions, phone numbers, and diagrams for fire, tornado, and flood shall be visibly posted and documented at least once a month for fire and tornado. Records shall be maintained for current and previous year.

109.11(4)b: Record of monthly inspections of outdoor recreation area and equipment shall be kept.

109.11(8)c: All centers: Annual inspection prior to heating season of all fuel-burning appliances to reduce risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and shall install one carbon monoxide detector on each floor that conforms to UL Standard 2034.

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

109.6(4)c: Center repeats Iowa record checks at a minimum of every two years or when aware of additional child abuse or criminal history that occurs.
- Two staff files (CC, AW-J) reviewed lacked documentation of a current Iowa record check result.

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109.6(4)d: Center repeats national criminal history checks at a minimum of every four years or when aware of additional history that occurs.
- Two staff files (CC, AW-J) reviewed lacked documentation of a current Iowa record check result.

109.9(1)b: All files contain a pre-employment physical exam report completed within six months prior to hire and at least every three years. Physical exams shall be documented on form 470-5152, Child Care Provider Physical Examination Report.
- Two staff files (CC, AW-J) reviewed lacked documentation of a current physical exam on required form 470-5152.

109.9(1)c: All files contain documentation to indicate that ongoing staff training requirements are met, including current certifications in first aid/CPR and mandatory child abuse training.
- One staff file (CC) reviewed (e.g. paper file, ipower) lacked documentation of a current first-aid, CPR, UP, MCART, and required annual professional development hours.
- One staff file (AW-J) reviewed (e.g. paper file, ipower) lacked documentation of current CPR and MCART.

109.9(2)h: Signed and dated valid Certificate of Immunization, Certificate of Immunization Exemption, or Provisional Certificate of Immunization, provided by the department must be on file for each child enrolled as required by Iowa Administrative Code 641—7.
- One child file (AM) reviewed lacked required immunization documentation.

109.10(13)b: Emergency instructions, phone numbers, and diagrams for fire, tornado, and flood shall be visibly posted and documented at least once a month for fire and tornado. Records shall be maintained for current and previous year.
- Documentation of a monthly fire drill and a monthly tornado drill were not found for the current or previous year on the day of the license visit.

109.11(4)b: Record of monthly inspections of outdoor recreation area and equipment shall be kept.
- Documentation of a monthly outdoor play area inspection was not found for the current or previous year on the day of the license visit.

109.11(8)c: All centers: Annual inspection prior to heating season of all fuel-burning appliances to reduce risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and shall install one carbon monoxide detector on each floor that conforms to UL Standard 2034.
- Documentation of an annual fuel burning appliance inspection was not found on the day of the license visit.

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

The outdoor play area has developed an uneven area of cement that continues to increase a fall-tripping hazard. Please reach out to the building owner as to resolution.

Also, the kitchen garbage disposal was found to not be properly working. Please additionally reach out to the building owner as to resolution.

A full license is issued. Thank you for the visit.

Date: 10/09/2025

HHS Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons

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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**.