Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Little GEM Learning Center - North

Provider No.: 51891

Address: 4750 42nd ST NE, Cedar Rapids, IA, 52411

County: Linn

Director's Name: Emilie Gardner

On-Site Supervisor: Emilie Gardner

Phone Number: 3192002999

E-Mail: ksmeisterling@gmail.com
emilieagardner@gmail.com

HHS Visit Date: 01/08/2026

Licensing Period: 06/01/2026 to 06/01/2028

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 06/05/2025

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

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

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	6:30 AM to 5:30 PM		
Tuesday	6:30 AM to 5:30 PM		
Wednesday	6:30 AM to 5:30 PM		
Thursday	6:30 AM to 5:30 PM		
Friday	6:30 AM to 5:30 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	32	30	48		110
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

Little GEM operates the following two licensed programs in Linn County: Little GEM Learning Center (license #47824; opened 9/14/16) and Little GEM Learning Center - North (license #51891; opened 8/29/22). Specifically, this report pertains to Little GEM Learning Center - North. On 1/8/2026, management reported enrollment is 50.

Founding multi-site program owner is Katie Meisterling. Ms. Meisterling has a BA degree in elementary education and a MA degree in early childhood. Ms. Meisterling has experience working with children and participates in annual professional development. Combined director/on-site supervisor is Emilie Gardner. Ms. Gardner has been in this role since summer 2023. Ms. Gardner has a MA degree in marriage and family therapy, has experience working with children and participates in annual professional development.

On 1/8/2026, program space was observed. Primary programming occurs in age defined classrooms. The building has sufficient restrooms and handwashing sinks to accommodate enrolled children. The center has an on-site kitchen and outdoor play areas. Since the last review, the 1yo room obtained 3 new highchairs. Ms. Gardner discussed how the center did acquire some new materials since the last review. On the day of this monitoring visit, areas of study throughout the classrooms included winter and snowmen. Curriculum observed allowed for a variety of play experiences (e.g. 1yo room bubble play was being greatly enjoyed!) that piqued child interest as well as encouraged social emotional growth, innovation and child choice. On 1/8/2026, staff were observed to be in ratio and actively engaged with the children in all activities including food rituals and routine transitions. Children responded well to staff and appeared to be truly enjoying their day.

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2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

According to the family handbook, the mission of Little GEM Learning Center is "...to “Grow, Enrich, and Mentor” all children, staff, and families in our community in hopes that they will leave our program well equipped to achieve their full potential."

Little GEM has the following website: https://www.littlegemlearningcenter.com/. Little GEM also has a private social media page for enrolled family and current staff.

Founding original multi-site owner Ms. Meisterling is a local entrepreneur invested in the city of Cedar Rapids and surrounding community. Ms. Meisterling is also the combined director/on-site supervisor of Little Gem Learning Center. Management (e.g. Ms. Meisterling, Ms. Gardner) is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as their own program's policies and procedures. Management has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed as required and maintained in a secure manner. Ms. Garnder acknowledged how their team of staff has been doing great having increased communication and willingness to help each other out. Ms. Garnder reported receiving much positive feedback from families expressing increased happiness.

As of 1/8/2026, Little GEM Learning Center was again found to be maintaining the required postings, maintaining parent-program information centers, utilizing technological communication resources, and offering family programming activities. Little Gem Learning Center - North's curriculum aligns with Iowa Early Learning Standards, incorporates preschool assessments, focuses on kindergarten readiness, and provides experiences in fine and gross motor skills, social/emotional skills, language/literacy learning and math/science exploration. Family activities have historically included holiday/seasonal celebrations, outdoor theater night, "Thanksgiving Feast", trunk-or-treat event, Christmas concert with visit from Santa, summer off-site field trips, and preschool graduation with food truck.

Each Little Gem Learning Center has policies and procedures including those for safety, daily health checks, hand washing, diapering, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. On the day of this monitoring visit, Ms. Gardner discussed how staff help ensure the children's space is sanitary and hazard free each day by following code required policies and procedures as well as their own policies and procedures. Ms. Gardner also talked about how the program continues to have support from building and program owner Ms. Meisterling as to building-grounds conditions and repairs.

Each Little Gem Learning Center has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. Little Gem programs have successfully navigated through the 2019 winter Polar Vortex, 2019 health (covid-19) pandemic, 8/10/20 Derecho Storm, 2021 food supply issues, 2022 infant formula shortages, air quality alerts (2023, 2025), and repeated technology outages (7/19/24 global technology outage, 10/10/2025 AWS outage, 10/29/2025 Microsoft outage).

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

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

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.
- Staff paper file and ipower profile (AH hired September 2025) reviewed lacked documentation of current first-aid and CPR which was required within the first 90 days of employment.

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.
- As noted in previous reports, the outdoor play areas shall have attention. There continues to be a lack of any cushion surfacing underneath some outdoor equipment, a very minimal cushion surfacing depth under remaining outdoor equipment, rusty swing chains, and sanitation hazards related to a partially covered sand-sensory play area that also included some small rocks. Remedy. Discussions as to solutions continue to include getting one fenced-in section of the outdoor play area

fully compliant while resolving issues on the other outdoor play areas, removing damaged and/or not developmentally appropriate climbing equipment, removing equipment where cushion surfacing is too difficult to obtain and/or maintain, removing open sensory areas of sand with small rocks and so on.

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 the current annual fuel burning appliance inspection was not found on the day of this monitoring visit.

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Licensing supports updating all highchairs for infants.

Secure or lock the climbing wall in the playroom as it shall not be used. Cushion surfacing is required underneath all climbing equipment (indoor and outdoor) as outlined in the US Consumer Product Safety Commission's (US CPSC) Public Playground Safety Handbook.

Any replaced toilet seat shall be sized to fit the toilet basin (e.g. playroom).

Replace any stained toilet seats (e.g. playroom).

Discontinue the use of unattached individual toddler potty-seats (e.g. 2yo room) as they are a sanitation hazard. Replace toilet seats with a standard one that also has a built-in attached toddler seat.

The restroom located in the current 3yo room does not have a fully working handwashing faucet. Remedy.

Repair damaged window screens or leave those with damaged or missing screens closed.

Improper fitting toilet seats, dilapidated toilet seats, broken sink faucets, and damaged window screens have been noted in prior reports. As a result, further such findings will need to be noted as violations in future reports.

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

Date: 01/20/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons

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**.