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

Name of Center: A Step Above Child Care and Learning Center, LLC **Enrollment:** 36 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 50771

Street: 2882 Palo Marsh Rd Suite A **City:** Palo Iowa **Zip** 52324 **County:** Linn

Mailing Address: 2882 Palo Marsh RD Suite A, Palo, IA, 52324

Director's Name: Michelle McKinstry **Phone Number:** 319-851-2671

On-Site Supervisor(s): Tiffany Morris **E-Mail:** mgreenwalker01@gmail.com

Date(s) of Visit: 05-29-2025

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

LICENSING VISITS

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

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

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

Date Inspected: 09-06-2022

Comments :

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

Financial Type: X Profit 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	12	12	20	24	68
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 08-01-2025 to 08-01-2027
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 06-27-2025

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

Not applicable.

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

A Step Above Child Care and Learning Center (ASACCLC) commenced operations on 8/29/2019. The profit program is located in a building adjacent other local businesses. ASACCLC operates year-round, Monday through Friday from 6am to 6pm. The program serves children age infant through school-age. Current enrollment is 36.

ASACCLC founding owner and director is Michelle McKinstry. Ms. McKinstry has experience operating her own in-home childcare, has experience working in licensed childcare, and continues to participate in child development related training. Since October 2024, Ms. Morris has been the on-site supervisor. Ms. Morris has experience working with children and child development training.

On 5/29/2025, program space was observed.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

A Step Above Child Care and Learning Center (ASACCLC) offers a variety of early learning programming and childcare to help meet the needs of children and families in the community. ASACCLC is located in a predominantly rural area and accepts a variety of funding sources. This program commenced operations in October 2019, and during 2025, will be celebrating their 6th year of providing childcare in the community. Congratulations!

ASACCLC sponsors a social media page for enrolled families and current employees.

The philosophy of ASACCLC is "...built around the concept that children are born ready to learn. As caregivers, we strive to create a learning environment that is safe, stimulating and encouraging..."

Ms. McKinstry is a local entrepreneur invested in children and the community. Prior to opening a licensed childcare center, founding owner Michelle McKinstry reported operating an in-home childcare for several years and participating in childcare quality initiatives. Ms. McKinstry is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as her own program's policies and procedures. Ms. McKinstry is organized and has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed as required and maintained in a secure manner. ASACCLA has a combination of seasoned staff and new staff.

ASACCLC has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. ASACCLC successfully navigated through the 2019 health (covid-19) pandemic, 8/10/20 Derecho Storm, 2021 food supply issues, 2022 infant formula shortages, air quality alerts (2023, 2025) and 7/19/24 global technology outage.

Building and grounds are maintained. Center kitchen is spacious, organized, and sanitary. Classrooms are arranged to keep learning at the forefront. ASACCLC curriculum includes a combination of learning strategies incorporating Brightwheel concepts and teacher-inspired ideas. Curriculum also incorporates off-site field trip experiences, on-site guest speakers, themed days, gardening projects, and holiday/seasonal parties. In the past, Ms. McKinstry reported applying for and

receiving a Farm to Table grant which allowed them to incorporate gardening experiences.

ASACCLC continues efforts at optimal communication between the program/staff and families. The program has organized parent-staff/program information centers, offers regular program newsletters, utilizes technological communication resources, and supports family programming activities.

ASACCLC collaborates well with community partners including the local school districts, local businesses, counseling agencies, CCR&R and health professionals. ASACCLA has historically held seasonal outreach events including sponsoring a giving tree for senior residents at two local care centers.

Each child is engaged in a daily health check upon arrival for early detection of apparent illness, communicable disease, or unusual condition or behavior which may adversely affect the child or the group. This program has policies and procedures in place for hand washing, diapering, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Children have access to an array of materials (e.g. books, imaginative play options, building materials, crafts) that encourage innovative play. Activities observed were many (e.g. infant cares, indoor free play, outdoor free play). Routine transitions (e.g. clean-up activities) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative play environment. Throughout the classrooms, staff were overheard providing children with many words of encouragement and encouraging social graces. Children responded well to staff and appeared to be truly enjoying their day.

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

109.7(2): Center directors and all staff have the required contact hours of training.
- Staff file (SP hired May 2024) reviewed lacked documentation of a federal record check result, current UP, current MCART, current Essentials or any annual professional growth hours.

109.9(2): All files are updated at least annually and when a change occurs.
- Three child files (LL, KT, ES) lacked documentation of an annual update.

109.11(3)a: Center shall ensure that: Facility and premises are sanitary, safe, and hazard free. Adequate indoor and outdoor space is provided. The outdoor area shall include safe play equipment and area of shade. Sufficient space provided for dining. Sufficient lighting shall be provided. Sufficient ventilation. Sufficient heating. sufficient cooling. Sufficient bathroom and diapering facilities. Equipment, including kitchen appliances, are maintained so as not to result in burns, shock, or injury to children. Sanitation and safety procedures for the center are developed and implemented to reduce risk or injury or harm to children and reduce transmission of disease.
- All required areas were found to not have properly made and labeled cleaner, sanitizer and disinfectant (e.g. sanitizer for food surfaces, disinfectant for diapering areas). All cleaner, sanitizer and spray bottles shall be labeled with contents (e.g. name of product), dilution if applicable, and instructions of use (including dwell time, if required to be made fresh daily).
- Lower cabinets in the 18mo-3yo room contained items requiring them to be childproofed or the items stored in an inaccessible manner.

109.12(1): Program structure that uses developmentally appropriate practices and written program of activities planned to the developmental needs of children served. Program complements but does not duplicate school curriculum. Schedule of program is posted in a place visible to parents.
- A daily program schedule and current plan of activities (e.g. lesson plans, curriculum) was not found to be posted in each child room on the day of the license visit.
- Open food grazing is not good curriculum and does not support food time staff-child supervision. Three children were observed eating foods (e.g. cheese balls, waffles) while walking around and playing with program materials throughout the room. Designated clean, sanitized food tables as well as sufficient hand washing policies and practices are required.
- The secondary exit doors leading to the outdoor playground offer a sidewalk where some children use riding toys, push toys, bouncy balls and so on. The current step down from the sidewalk into the rest of the outdoor playground is significant. Replenish the cushion surfacing.

109.15(1): Center shall serve each child a full, nutritionally balanced meal as defined by CACFP guidelines. Staff shall provide supervision at table during snacks and meals. Children at center two hours or longer shall be offered food of not less than two hours and no more than three hours apart unless child is asleep.
- Many food items (e.g. pizza rolls, chips, corn dogs, cheese balls, Fruity Pebbles) listed on the posted menus do not support CACFP nutritionally balanced meals.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continue to ensure all primary and secondary exit doors and routes remain unobstructed at all times.

It is beneficial to note, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) and the nurse consultant are excellent resources to access training opportunities and support in the area.

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

*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.