Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Hand in Hand-Echo Hill

Provider No.: 51559

Address: 400 Echo Hill RD, Marion, IA, 52302

County: Linn

Director's Name: Kathy Kolthoff

On-Site Supervisor: Bailey Meza

Phone Number: 3193733363

E-Mail: hih@handinhandinc.com

HHS Visit Date: 01/12/2026

Licensing Period: 05/01/2025 to 05/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 06/14/2024

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 6:00 PM		
Tuesday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Wednesday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Thursday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Friday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General				80	80
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

The Hand in Hand Inc Early Learning Centers original and founding owner is Kathy Kolthoff. Ms. Kolthoff is a local entrepreneur who began by opening a home childcare in 1998. Then in 2021 due to family and community need, Ms. Kolthoff's home childcare relocated and expanded into licensed childcare. Over the last 28 years, Hand in Hand Inc Family Learning Centers has broadened locations including some in partnership with local school districts. Specifically, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill is located inside Echo Hill Elementary School which is part of the Linn Mar Community School District. Hand in Hand - Echo Hill has been in operation since August 2021. Hand in Hand - Echo Hill is a profit program which operates year-round Monday through Friday 6:30am to 6:00pm. During the summer, full days of emergency closing (e.g. snow day), and some breaks (e.g. winter break, spring break), this program has the ability to combine with other Hand in Hand sites. Hand in Hand - Echo Hill serves school-age children. Total enrolled and attending children were reported to be 80 on 1/12/2026.

The Hand in Hand Inc Early Learning Centers multi-site owner and executive director is Kathy Kolthoff. Ms. Kolthoff holds a degree in Early Childhood Education and Business Management. Ms. Kolthoff has achieved the National Administrators Credential (NAC) and is a member of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as well as the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children (IAEYC). The Hand in Hand Inc Early Learning Centers multi-site management personnel includes Ms. Sara Swestka who has been with the program for over 20 years. Ms. Swestka holds a BA Degree in Elementary Education and Early Childhood Education. Ms. Swestka has experience working with children, continues to participate in child development related training, and has achieved NAC. The Hand in Hand Inc Early Learning Centers multi-site curriculum specialist Katie Simmons has been with the program for over 19 years, and specifically, been part of the management team since 2011. Ms. Simmons has an AA degree in early childhood education, has experience working with children and participates in professional development. The Hand in Hand Inc Early Learning

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Centers multi-site school-age coordinators are Molly Luedeman and Lindsey DeDecker. Ms. Luedeman has an early childhood education administration degree, has been employed with the program for several years, has experience working with children and participates in professional development. Ms. DeDecker has been employed with the program for several years, has experience working with children and continues to participate in professional development. Site specific on-site supervisor (OSS) of Hand in Hand - Echo Hill is Bailey Meza. Ms. Meza qualified for the on-site supervisor position in August of 2021. Ms. Meza has been employed with Hand in Hand for several years, has experience working with children and continues to participate in professional development.

On 1/12/2026, program space was observed. Primary programming occurs in the school cafeteria. Program has some access to the school cafeteria. Program materials are organized on mobile shelves for ease of use and storage given shared school space. Sufficient restrooms including hand washing sinks are available to accommodate total capacity. The program provides all childcare foods and has areas for food storage. Since the last review, the required posting area was observed to have been updated. Ms. Meza reported how some new food items have also been added to the snack menu. On 1/12/2026, the area of study was the winter season. Activities observed included free crafting, puzzle work, games, dinosaurs, imaginative play options, and book reading. Curriculum allowed for a variety of experiences that were observed to pique child interest as well as encourage leadership, innovation, good sportsmanship, the use of social graces and child choice. During the monitoring visit, routine transitions went smoothly including restroom-drink breaks, snack rituals, periodic attendance taking and clean-up procedures. On 1/12/2026, staff were observed to be in ratio, utilizing positive redirection when needed and engaged in programming with the children. Children appeared comfortable with staff and to be enjoying the day.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The mission of Hand in Hand is to "...provide a safe, nurturing, and engaging environment where every child can build a strong foundation for lifelong learning. We support development through age-appropriate practices, individualized care and meaningful experiences that foster growth, confidence and a love for learning in every child we serve..." The specific school-age vision is to "...provide a safe, enriching environment where children can spend time before or after school...to present children with the life skills of teamwork, sportsmanship, creativity and leadership through exciting, challenging activities..."

Hand in Hand has the following website for families and the community to learn more about their programs: https://handinhandinc.com/.

In 2022, Hand in Hand received a "Certificate of Appreciation" from the Linn Mar Community School District to certify that Hand in Hand made a significant and important contribution to Linn Mar High School and is held in the highest esteem as a member of their school community.

As of 1/12/2026, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill continues to have a seasoned management team (e.g. Ms. Kolthoff, Ms. Swestka, Ms. Simmons, Ms. Luedeman, Ms. DeDecker, Ms. Meza). Hand in Hand has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed and maintained as required. Management is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as their own policies and procedures. There continues to be local collaboration among all Hand in Hand programs for the sharing of materials, curriculum, ideas, planning, new staff orientation, new staff shadowing/training, behavior strategies and professional development training. The management team also continues to be mentors throughout the community as well as part of an online innovative national director social media group. Hand in Hand management team is additionally part of a local task force known as "Building Community Childcare Solutions" which examines childcare needs and solutions. Ms. Meza talked about having been this location's OSS for over 4 years and how she greatly enjoys working with the children.

On 1/12/2026, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill was again found to be maintaining required postings, maintaining a family-program information center, offering regular newsletters, utilizing technological communication resources, and offering family programming activities. Hand in Hand offers a "...daily curriculum of exciting, challenging activities for children...theme-based curriculum filled with fun activities to help fine tune critical literacy skills with activity like reading aloud and writing stories..." Curriculum includes a reading incentive program called "Reading Rainbow" and homework time/assistance. Hand in Hand also supports a character counts curriculum offering experiences in teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership and creativity. Summer camp 2026 school-age planning is currently underway. Summer programming historically includes a Junior Summer Camp experience, field trips, theme-based activities, and in-house events. Ms. Meza discussed how since the last review the program obtained some additional supplies including a new book

cart. Ms. Meza acknowledged the positive family feedback they continue to receive and how families keep returning for all the fun childcare experiences they offer.

Hand in Hand, Inc - Echo Hill 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 1/12/2026, management and staff discussed how they continue to help ensure the children's space is sanitary and hazard free each day by following the policies and procedures. Management and staff also talked about having much continued support from the school district (e.g. school administration, school maintenance, school custodial team) as to daily building and grounds conditions and repairs. Although not used by the childcare, the on-site school kitchen is inspected by the local health department. There is an AED on-site.

All Hand in Hand childcare programs have emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. Hand in Hand sites have successfully navigated through flooding events (2008 historic Linn County flood), 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). Also noted that in 2023 to present day, Hand in Hand began monthly employee safety plan reviews focusing on a series of topics beyond those within licensing requirements including housekeeping, ergonomics, proper lifting, workplace violence, and slips, trips and falls.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

None noted.

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

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Continue to collaborate with the school district regarding maintenance of the outdoor playground (e.g. adequate cushion surface depth, chipping/rusting equipment, power washing of outdoor equipment). If areas of the outdoor playground become unsatisfactory, the childcare shall refrain from accessing those areas until remedies are made.

The program's license remains in full status. Thank you for the visit.

Date: 03/06/2026

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**.