Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Growing Minds Early Learning Center

Provider No.: 30419

Address: 608 West 4th ST, Waterloo, IA, 50702

County: Black Hawk

Director's Name: Meghan MacMullen & Ed Gruenwald

On-Site Supervisor: Mary Neisen

Phone Number: 3192362063

E-Mail: ed@grinandgrowchildcare.org

HHS Visit Date: 07/23/2026

Licensing Period: 08/01/2025 to 08/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 08/15/2025

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 1

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

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

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Tuesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Wednesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Thursday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Friday	6:00 AM to 6:00 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	15	23	60	0	98
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On 07/23/26 I made an unannounced off year licensing visit to Growing Minds Early Learning Center, previously known as Grin and Grow Ltd-West 4th Street, in Waterloo. I met with Meghan MacMullen (formally Meghan Smith), the co-director and Mary Neisen, the on-site supervisor/program coordinator. Ms. MacMullen started with the program in January 2023. She has an AA in education and several years of experience in childcare. Ms. Niesen has mostly been with the program since 1995. She left the center in May 2019 but returned in January 2020. Ms. Neisen has her CDA. I also briefly met with Ed Gruenwald, the co-director of the program/director of operations and development for the center. Mr. Gruenwald started with the program in October 2019 and became the co-director in January 2022. He has an MS in forest recreation resource management. The center employes 15 staff members.

The childcare center was founded in 1943. The center is located inside the First Congregational United Church of Christ, but the program is not affiliated with the church. The program operates Monday through Friday from 6:00 am until 6:00 pm. It serves children who are infants until they start Kindergarten. There are currently 51 children enrolled.

The program utilizes the following classrooms: infant room (Little Ducklings), toddler room (Cardinals), two-year-old room (Parrots), two and one-half through three-year-old room (Penguins), three-year-old room (Blue Jays) and a four and five-year-old room (Flamingos). An inspection of each room was completed. Windows provide natural lighting. The rooms are decorated with the children's art projects, and posters to assist the children with the learning process, such as the alphabet, shapes, colors and numbers. The children's birthdays were posted. There is an area for circle time in the rooms for the older children.

The centers observed on the day of the licensing visit include library, Lego/blocks, table toys, games, puzzles, playdough,

transportation, art, dramatic play, writing, math, science/discovery, woodworking, sensory table and music. Centers were arranged in a manner that allowed easy movement between activities, but it also allowed for clear supervision by staff members. Materials were in good condition. The materials are located at child level, so they are easily accessible to the children.

There are two bathrooms in the hallway on the upper level that are used by the children. The boy's bathroom has one toilet, two urinals and two sinks and the girl's bathroom has two toilets and two sinks. There is also a changing table in the girl's bathroom. Handwashing and diaper changing procedures were posted. There are two bathrooms and a changing table that are shared by the Cardinals and Parrot's room. Each bathroom has one toilet and one sink and handwashing and diaper changing procedures were posted. There are additional bathrooms in the church.

The program uses a variety of resources to develop their lesson plans. Activities are based on weekly themes. Each teacher prepares their own lesson plans. The preschool children receive ASQ assessments. Lesson plans were available to review in each room. The program offers free preschool for three and four-year-old children for the families who qualify through ECI-Cedar Valley Promise. This is a state grant. The free preschool is Monday through Friday 8:00 am until 1:00 pm. The center uses Tucker Turtle "turtle techniques" to help children learn to calm themselves.

There was a phone in the classrooms and kitchen and the emergency numbers with the center's address and phone number were posted. Emergency fire and tornado procedures and evacuation diagrams were posted by most program doors and outdoor exits. Post the evacuation diagram near the second exit out of the Flamingo room and near the outdoor exit in the Cardinals room. Daily schedules were posted in each room.

I reviewed documentation of monthly fire and tornado drills. I reviewed documentation of monthly playground inspections. The radon test was completed in June 2025 and must be repeated in five years. You must test each program room next time you conduct radon tests. The annual fuel burning inspection was completed and no concerns were noted. A carbon monoxide detector was on site in each of the classrooms and the kitchen. Outlets were protected. The fire marshal inspection occurred on 08/15/25.

The program uses the Brightwheel app to complete daily sheets for the children under the age of two. They are also completing paper daily sheets in the infant room. The app is also used to communicate with all families.

I observed and/or discussed diaper changing procedures with staff members. Proper procedures are followed.

The center participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The center provides breakfast, lunch and a morning and afternoon snack. Trisa Edler is the cook. Ms. Edler states that Jaymee Lough makes a new menu each week. Menus are posted outside each of the classrooms on the parent board. Family style is used for the older children and the younger children are served their food.

The center provides formula, cereal and baby food for the infants. Bottles are being cleaned and sanitized in the kitchen dishwasher.

The kitchen was observed. The children's dietary special needs were posted. There is one refrigerator and thermometers were present. There are an additional refrigerator and upright freezer in the basement and thermometers were present. An industrial dishwasher is used to wash dishes. There are also two sinks available. The pantry is located off the Blue Jay classroom. Food items were stored according to NHSPS guidelines.

There were refrigerators in each childcare room and thermometers were present. Allergies were posted in the classrooms.

Lysol No Rinse Sanitizer is used to sanitize the food tables and Clorox All Purpose Disinfectant is used to disinfect the changing tables.

Cribs are used to nap in the infant room and cots are used in the other rooms.

The parent information is located inside the entrance. The mandatory reporter, childcare consultant and the handbook availability were posted. The license was conspicuously hung. A no-smoking sign was posted at the entrance.

The church has a fenced in playground area that is used by the childcare center. Woodchips are used for fall surfacing.

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There is a piece of climbing equipment with a slide. There is a grassy area that has a couple tunnels. Trees provide shade. There is a sandbox.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

I observed staff members to be enthusiastic during their interactions with the children. They were flexible with the schedule when they needed to be but also maintained a routine. Staff members were observed to interact with the children at their level. They spoke with children in calm voices and modeled good manners. They provided the children with clear and easy to understand directions. I observed staff members assist children with handwashing. They maintained positive conversation with the children. Staff members greeted the parents and children as they arrived for the day. Staff members were patient and used positive redirection when necessary. They would remind children of classroom rules, such as walking feet and being nice to friends. Children were offered choices. I observed staff members count children as they left the room to go outside. In the infant room the staff member was on the floor with the babies. She was nurturing and attentive. She worked on tummy time and rocked children.

The center has a great administrative team. They interact in a manner that makes it obvious they have great relationships with one another.

Ms. Neisen states they are like a family at the center. When they interview people, they tell them they follow all HHS rules and they do not allow phones in the rooms.

Mr. Gruenwald states they have longevity with their lead teachers. He states their lead teachers for the older children have either AA or BA degrees.

Ms. Niesen states they care about their staff members both inside and outside of the building, but they also hold their staff members accountable.

Ms. MacMullen states Jaymee Lough is the training coordinator and she visits each of the classrooms to do observations and provide feedback to teachers.

The program works with AEA regularly as they identify children with needs.

The program has an IQ4K level of 1 that expires on 11/30/26. They are applying for a level 2.

The program has a Facebook page.

Ms. MacMullen states they go the extra mile for their families. If they have parents who do not talk English, they will use the Google translation service or come up with other creative ideas to communicate. They want all their families to feel heard.

The center is in a secure building and there are cameras in the classrooms.

The center uses the Brightwheel app to communicate with parents.

Staff members receive childcare benefits for working at the center. After one month of employment, they receive 100% discount off their oldest child, 50 % off their next oldest child and 25% off the next oldest child during the hours the employee is working or while they are on paid time off.

The center has scholarships to assist with childcare fees.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

There are no citations.

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

N/A

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

A full license is issued for the remainder of the licensing period. All HHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period.

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management:
I discussed with Ms. MacMullen and Ms. Neisen their oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) Understand expectations, 2) managing frustrations, 3) monitor performance. Ms. Neisen states if staff members have behavioral concerns with a child, they will call administration and they go to the room right away. They will pull the child out of the room and work with them one on one. They try to support the child in different rooms and they will include AEA if necessary. They try to talk with the parents. Lead staff members know they can ask and the assistant teacher in the classroom can take over the other children. The lead teacher can separate the child with behaviors and work with them. They talk with staff members about their “hot buttons” or “triggers” and what they can do to prevent themselves from reaching level ten. They have them think about what then can do in the classroom so they do not get frustrated.

To monitor, they have cameras in the classrooms. Ms. Lough is consistently in classrooms doing observations. She is in and out of rooms throughout the day. The other administrative team will also go into classrooms and do observations. They then meet with the staff member and talk with them about what they should start or stop and what needs to improve and what works. They allow the staff members to have input.

Date: 07/31/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Becky Frost

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**.