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: 09/28/2026

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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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday		8:45 AM to 3:00 PM	
Tuesday		8:45 AM to 3:00 PM	
Wednesday		8:45 AM to 3:00 PM	
Thursday		8:45 AM to 3:00 PM	
Friday		8:45 AM to 3:00 PM	
Saturday			

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. Essential Montessori operates school-year only Monday through Friday 8:45am to 3:00pm. Total enrolled and attending children were reported to be 24 on 9/28/2026.

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 9/28/2026, program space was observed. The classroom was again 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 again 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 late summer produce, nocturnal animals, leaves and autumn. On 9/28/2026, staff and children were observed during morning work cycle and events. Morning activities were found to include lessons on collages, leaf puzzles, sorting, counting and pattern transferring, letter writing, phonics work and social graces of snack rituals. Before transitioning outdoors to explore, a group discussion included past weekend activities, the current day's weather and upcoming events. On 9/28/2026, staff were observed to be in ratio, utilizing positive redirection when needed and actively engaged with the children. Children appeared comfortable with staff and to be enjoying their experiences.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

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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 9/28/2026, the program is celebrating an impressive 34 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 remains knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as her own program's policies and procedures. Assistant staff is starting her second year with Essential Montessori.

On 9/28/2026, 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. Ms. Craft continues to complete an inspiring monthly newsletter for families with detailed program information. The program hosts various family events throughout the school-year 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 continues to emphasize how 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 late spring-summer fresh produce (e.g. tomatoes) was found in the program's outdoor garden bed. Ms. Craft discussed how her quality program continues to support a peaceful, engaging learning environment.

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 9/28/2026, 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 talked about the building owner's responsibilities related to building and ground conditions. Ms. Craft also acknowledged the support she has from currently enrolled and previous graduated families.

Essential Montessori continues to have emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are regularly reviewed and updated as needed. Essential Montessori has successfully navigated through flooding events (historic 2008 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) and 2026 nationwide cyclosporiasis outbreak.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

109.9(1)a: All files contain:Copy of a department criminal history record check form or any other permission form approved by Department of Public Safety for conducting an Iowa or national criminal history record checkCopy of a request for child abuse information form, when applicable.Copies of results of Iowa record checks conducted through the SING for review by the department upon request.Copies of national criminal history check results.Any department issued documents sent to the center related to a record check, regardless of findings.

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.

109.11(8)b: Centers at ground level that use basement area as program space, or have a basement beneath program space: Testing and plan for remedy of radon is conducted.

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

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- One staff file reviewed (AW) lacked documentation of having completed an Iowa and federal record check.

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 reviewed (AW) lacked documentation of current first-aid, CPR, UP, MCART and Essentials.

109.11(8)b: Centers at ground level that use basement area as program space, or have a basement beneath program space: Testing and plan for remedy of radon is conducted.
- Documentation of current radon testing was not found on the day of the license visit. Most recent radon testing was completed August 2021.

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Ms. Craft is addressing the dilapidated outdoor climbing structure and the uneven cement outside the building. Please consider connecting with Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) and apply for the "Growing Iowa" fund (https://www.iowaccrr.org/child-care-providers/iowa-childcarefunding-opportunities/) designed to support regulatory compliance and quality childcare in Iowa.

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management
Licensing discussed with management oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) understand expectations, 2) manage frustrations, and 3) monitor performance. Ms. Craft discussed how she is present at her program. Ms. Craft talked about ensuring staff have breaks, the communication with families, the establishment of child behavior plans when needed, changing classroom routines, utilizing the curriculum, completing written incident reports, sending children and/or staff home when needed, and exercising the program's required polices for enrollment and disenrollment of children as needed. Licensing and Ms. Craft also talked about resources available through the CCR&R behavioral specialist position, our local Child Care Nurse Consultant, the local Tanager Place Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) program and through our local AEA.

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Congratulations on your years of service to early childhood, Ms. Craft!

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

Date: 10/30/2026

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**.