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

Name of Center: Panther Academy **Enrollment:** 90 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 36659

Street: 321 W South St **City:** Monticello Iowa **Zip** 52310 **County:** Jones

Mailing Address: 321 W South St, Monticello, IA, 52310

Director's Name: Tammy Helgens **Phone Number:** 319-465-5425

On-Site Supervisor(s): Tammy Helgens **E-Mail:** Tammy.Helgens@monticello.k12.ia.us

Date(s) of Visit: 02-19-2025

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: 12-04-2023

Comments : Does Comply.

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

Financial Type: Profit X Non-Profit NA

Accredition: Accredited NAEYC NSACA Other X NA

Program Serves: Infants (0-23 mo.) 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			20	40	60
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 04-01-2025 to 04-01-2027
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 03-19-2025

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

Not applicable.

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

Panther Academy - 36659 is located inside Shannon Elementary School which is part of the Monticello Community School District. The non-profit program commenced operations several years ago. Panther Academy has the ability to operate year-round, Monday through Friday from 6:30am to 6pm. This program serves preschool through school-age children. Current enrollment is 90.

Multi-site director is Tammy Helgens. Ms. Helgens is also the combined director/on-site supervisor of specifically Panther Academy at Shannon Elementary. Ms. Helgens has been the director of Panther Academy since 2015. Ms. Helgens has several years experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training.

On 2/19/2025, program space was observed.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

Panther Academy is well-established in a predominantly rural area and accepts a variety of funding sources. Panther Academy currently offers childcare at two local elementary schools - Shannon Elementary School and Carpenter Elementary School. Future goals include expanding preschool-age childcare outside of the 4yo SWVPP as well as a 2025-2026 school-year relocation.

The mission of Panther Academy is "...to provide high quality, developmentally appropriate child care services for school aged children in a safe and educational environment..."

Panther Academy has the following website for persons to to learn more about their program: https://www.monticello.k12.ia.us/pantheracademy/.

Ownership and management (e.g. school district, board, multi-site director Ms. Helgens) of Panther Academy has remained consistent. During 2025, Ms. Helgens will be celebrating her 8th year with Panther Academy. Congratulations! Ms. Helgens is organized, and in turn, Panther Academy operates smoothly. Ms. Helgens 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 program's policies and procedures.

Since the last review, the program has retained seasoned staff as well as hired a few new ones. Some staff have reported being employed with the childcare as well as with the school district as a para/sub outside of childcare hours. Flexible scheduling, professional development and celebrating staff achievements is part of program operations.

Panther Academy operates under the Monticello School Board and has a good relationship with the school district. Building and grounds are well-maintained. School custodial staff, school administration, school nurse, and school food service personnel help ensure the children's space is sanitary and hazard free each day. The school kitchen is inspected at least annually by the health department. Panther Academy has historically received summer lunch prepared by the school

district. The school district also provides some transportation services to the childcare. There is an AED on-site.

Panther Academy continues efforts at optimal communication between the program/staff and families. The program has an organized parent-staff/program information center, has a place to display children's accomplishments (e.g. artwork) for families to enjoy, offers regular program newsletters, utilizes technological communication resources, and supports family programming activities.

Curriculum supports a child's natural desire to explore, create, enjoy the outdoors and develop new skills at their own pace through a supportive and healthy environment. The program's primary space is located in the school's gymnasium/cafeteria. As a result, the program is able to offer regular large gross motor activities even on inclement weather days. Summer 2025 program planning is well underway. Summer curriculum includes swimming experiences, individual reading time, cooking projects, dress-up days, guest speaker events, movie days and field trips (e.g. Creative Adventure Lab, Old Creamery Theater, Cedar Rapids Kernels, National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, Niabi Zoo, Collins Road Theaters, Skate Country, Legacy Lanes, Whispering Pines, local public library and local aquatic center).

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

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. The program has policies and procedures in place for handwashing, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Staff were observed warmly greeting children as they arrived for after-school programming. Activities observed included gathering activities with attendance, daily routines (e.g. restroom/water drink breaks, clean-up) and self-selected play experiences (e.g. imaginative child created toy store, building with Legos, building with Magna Tiles, crafting, dinosaur habitat making). Since the last review, five new director-created individual sensory work stations were established and observed to be greatly enjoyed by children (e.g. kinetic sand)! Staff were actively engaged with the children, provided positive redirection when needed, helped children problem solve and encouraged social graces. Children appeared to be greatly enjoying their childcare day!

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

None noted.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure children's personal items are stored separately from one another and off the floor.

As preschool offerings expand in the current building, updated floor plans are required.

Also, prior to the future relocation, please provide a new floor plan and new fire inspector certificate.

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.