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

Name of Center: Little GEM Learning Center **Enrollment:** 59 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 47824

Street: 430 16th AVE SW **City:** Cedar Rapids Iowa **Zip** 52404 **County:** Linn

Mailing Address: 430 16th AVE SW, Cedar Rapids, IA, 52404

Director's Name: Katie Meisterling **Phone Number:** 319-200-2999

On-Site Supervisor(s): Katie Meisterling **E-Mail:** ksmeisterling@gmail.com

Date(s) of Visit: 01-09-2025

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

Date Inspected: 01-03-2025

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 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	33	9	48	10	100
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 02-01-2025 to 02-01-2027
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 01-31-2025

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

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

Little GEM operates the following two licensed programs in Linn County: Little GEM Learning Center (license #47824; opened 9/14/16) and Little GEM Learning Center - North (license #51891; opened 8/29/22). Specifically, this report pertains to Little GEM Learning Center. Little GEM Learning Center offers a variety of childcare options and preschool programming to meet the needs of families and children in the community. The program operates year-round Monday through Friday 6:30am to 5:30pm. The program serves infants through preschool-age children. Current enrollment is 59.

Founding multi-site program owner and Little GEM Learning Center combined director/on-site supervisor is Katie Meisterling. Ms. Meisterling has a BA degree in elementary education and a MA degree in early childhood. Ms. Meisterling has much experience working with young children including running her own prior child development home.

On 1/9/2025, program space was observed.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

Little GEM Learning Center and Little GEM Learning Center - North offer a variety of early learning programming and childcare options to help meet the needs of children and families in the community. Both programs are located in predominantly urban areas and accept a variety of funding sources. During 2025, Little GEM Learning Center will be celebrating their 9th year of being in business and Little GEM Learning Center- North will be celebrating their 3rd year of business.

Little GEM has the following website: https://www.littlegemlearningcenter.com/. Little GEM also has a private social media page for enrolled family and current staff.

According to the family handbook, the mission of Little GEM Learning Center is "...to “Grow, Enrich, and Mentor” all children, staff, and families in our community in hopes that they will leave our program well equipped to achieve their full potential."

Little GEM Learning Center has a history of participation in quality initiatives including local quality initiatives.

Founding original owner/director Ms. Meisterling is a local entrepreneur invested in the city of Cedar Rapids and surrounding community. In addition to childcare, Ms. Meisterling supports foster families, is a mentor for other programs, and advocates for local retail businesses. Ms. Meisterling is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as her own program's policies and procedures. Ms. Meisterling 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. As a result, the program experiences smooth daily operations. Ms. Meisterling discussed the new 2024 school-age summer experiences including field trips that were offered.

Since the last monitoring visit, the program has retained seasoned staff as well as hired a few new ones. Staff throughout

the classrooms reported celebrating 8 years and 2 years employment with Little Gems. Ms. Meisterling continues to be proud of their team of employees who are flexible and assist in various capacities as needed. Ms. Meisterling discussed how staff accomplishments are celebrated and how staff appreciation is part of the program's operations (e.g. notes, small treats, staff character awards, staff holiday celebration). Notes of appreciation from families were observed to be posted in various classrooms.

Each Little Gem Learning Center has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. Little Gem programs have successfully navigated through the 2019 winter Polar Vortex, 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.

Little GEM Learning Center 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. Family activities have historically included a Valentine's exchange, "Thanksgiving Feast", trunk-or-treat event, holiday/seasonal celebrations, Spirit Week, door decorating contests, open house, staff/family conferences, and graduation ceremony (e.g. unique food truck treats - tacos, coffee).

Little GEM Learning Center is located in a leased historic building. The kitchen is spacious, sanitary and functional. Building and grounds are maintained. Classrooms continue to be arranged in a thoughtful manner with learning at the forefront. Children's accomplishments (e.g. artwork, mistletoe feet) are nicely displayed throughout the program space. Very unique little handprint snowflake art! Materials are accessible to children. Since the last review, the program obtained some new materials including infant soft building blocks. Curriculum includes learning through play and teacher-created ideas. Curriculum also includes on-site guest speaker events, and extra on-site enrichment opportunities (e.g. Symphony Kids, Daytime Dancers). Ms. Meisterling discussed future goals related to the outdoor play areas.

Little GEM Learning Center partners well with those throughout the community including local school districts, early access persons, local businesses, CCR&R, City of Cedar Rapids, and health professionals.

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. Staff were observed encouraging and engaging in hand washing at all levels. The program has policies and procedures in place for cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing. Cleaning supplies as well as cleaning checklists/reminders were observed in various areas on-site.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Activities observed were many (e.g. infant cares, center play, story-time of Dr. Seuss). In the older infant room, staff and children were observed while engaged in individual crafting "...skating through January..." with milestone footprints. Children have access to an array of materials (e.g. books, imaginative play options, building materials, games, puzzles, sensory, crafts) that encourage innovative play. Staff provided a companionable presence allowing children to have many choices in their play experiences. Routine transitions (e.g. clean up activities, food service rituals) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative play environment. Throughout the classrooms, staff were overheard providing children with meaningful discussion, offering positive redirection when needed and encouraging the use of 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:

None noted.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure any space that is not currently being used is organized and cleaned prior to resuming usage.

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.