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

Name of Center: Essential Montessori **Enrollment:** 34 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 25044

Street: 1350 Blairs Ferry Rd Ste A **City:** Hiawatha Iowa **Zip** 52233 **County:** Linn

Mailing Address: 1350 Blairs Ferry Rd Ste A, Hiawatha, IA, 52233

Director's Name: Constance "Connie" Craft **Phone Number:** 319-378-3100

On-Site Supervisor(s): Constance "Connie" Craft **E-Mail:** essential-montessori@hotmail.com

Date(s) of Visit: 10-21-2022

Licensing Visit X **Unannounced Visit** X **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: 12-02-2021

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: Infants (0-23 mo.) 2 Years X Preschool-Age X School-Age

Get-Well Evening Care Special Needs

SCHEDULE: Year-round X School-Year Summer Only

HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Age	Capacity
General			15	5	20
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 01-01-2022 to 01-01-2024
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 11-18-2022

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

Not applicable.

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

Essential Montessori has been a part of the Hiawatha area community since 1992. The school operates school-year only (August through May) Monday through Friday from 8:45am to 3:00pm. There is a morning session from 8:45am to 11:30am and an afternoon session from 12:15pm to 3:00pm. Children have the option to participate in a full-day or half-day program and attend 5-days, 3-days, or 2-days a week. Private alternative kindergarten and kindergarten are offered for those families and children who want to stay through the entire day. Current enrollment is 34.

Directress/Owner/On-site Supervisor of Essential Montessori is Constance "Connie" Craft. Ms. Craft has been and continues to be a certified Montessori Directress by the Montessori Institute of American since 1999. Ms. Craft has an AA degree and is a certified medical assistant. Ms. Craft has over thirty years of experience in the Montessori primary classroom.

Program space was observed on 10/21/22.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

Essential Montessori offers a variety of learning opportunities, including a private alternative kindergarten and kindergarten experience, to help meet the needs of children and families throughout the community. Essential Montessori is a well-established program located in a residential area of a predominantly urban neighborhood. This school is currently celebrating an impressive milestone 30th year! Congratulations!

Essential Montessori has the following website for families to learn more about the program: https://www.essential-montessori.com/.

The function 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."

Ownership and management of Essential Montessori has remained consistent. Directress Connie Craft is a local entrepreneur offering a small, personal Montessori program to the local community. Ms. Craft has over thirty years of experience in the Montessori primary classroom. Ms. Craft has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed as required and maintained in a confidential systematic way. As a result, the program experiences smooth daily operations. Ms. Craft is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as their own program's policies and procedures. The program also continues to retain a seasoned associate lead staff.

Essential Montessori continues efforts at optimal communication between the program/staff and families. A consistent main communication center/area with critical information (e.g. policies, procedures, program reminders) is located in the vestibule area. The entryway/vestibule area also has an observation window. Ms. Craft completes an inspiring monthly

newsletter for families with detailed program information. Conferences are held at least twice a year for families. The program also hosts various family events throughout the school-year including New Parent Orientation, fun day with outdoor graduation ceremony, Valentine's Dance, family picnic, Cinema Event, fund raising efforts (e.g. silent auction, HyVee receipts, For Small Hands, Book Clubs), trunk-or-treat experience, and seasonal celebrations. Essential Montessori has an active parent committee. Ms. Craft discussed how a person affiliated with their program generously donated a book of each child's choosing, from a recent book order, to that child. Ms. Craft talked about how her program works to increase early literacy and how each child having their own book(s) is impactful.

Building and grounds are well-maintained. The classroom is pristine, spacious, highly-organized and allows for much natural light. Many unique features create a warm home-like environment. The classroom serves 20 children at one time and is fully equipped and specifically designed with all the Montessori materials that are hands-on, self-correcting, and multi-sensorial. The materials are arranged in a purposeful manner and easily accessible to the children. 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 discussed how the work cycles also incorporate enrichment activities including but not limited to cooking, crafts, exploration (annual late summer butterfly raising work cycle) and social graces. 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. Ms. Craft discussed being proud of her quality program which promotes a peaceful engaging learning environment.

Essential Montessori partners well with those throughout the community including the local school district, early access persons, local businesses, CCR&R, and health professionals. Essential Montessori has a history of collaboration with the Mt. Mercy elementary education department to provide unique field experiences to students.

Essential Montessori offers much fresh foods for snack. Ms. Craft discussed regular foods served including broccoli, cucumbers, and apple slices.

Essential Montessori has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. The school has successfully navigated through the historic 2008 Linn County flood, 8/10/2020 Derecho Storm event, and 2019 pandemic.

Each family and child is greeted outside the main entrance as they arrive for the day's programming. A daily health check with each child is conducted 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. Staff encouraged children to "catch coughs" and "catch sneezes" in elbows. The program has policies and procedures in place for cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Classical music was quietly offered during work cycles. Areas of study included the fall season, pumpkins, leaves, and upcoming Halloween festivities. Children had access to an array of materials (e.g. books, building materials, puzzles, crafts) that encouraged innovative learning. Work lessons observed included clever seasonal crafting (e.g. tissue, painting), "eyeball" and insect transferring, "ghostly" matching and patterning, clothes pin/laundry experience, sponge absorption, pouring, nesting activity, and mammal exploration. During morning work cycles, one child verbalized observing a "real mystery" in the classroom (involving the calendar) excitedly explaining to his classmates "...it's my first real mystery ever..." Small groups of children then began to excitedly hypothesis among themselves as to the mystery while also continuing to work. After work cycles, a group discussion was had. Group discussion included the mystery being solved as the calendar was already set for the day by Ms. Craft for students to have extended outdoor time celebrating the warm second summer Iowa was having. Much laughter and smiles were observed as the mystery was solved! Discussion also included a child birthday celebration with "6 trips around the sun" and child sharing experience. Outdoor large gross motor and nature enjoyment activities were then offered. Staff provided a companionable presence allowing children to have many choices during work cycles. Routine transitions (e.g. clean-up) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative learning environment. Staff were overheard providing children with many words of encouragement and engaging children in much meaningful discussion. 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:

Please ensure an Iowa/SING record check with results is conducted and received prior to a person's involvement in childcare (and every 2 years thereafter). Please also ensure a fingerprint/federal record check is conducted and submitted prior to a person's involvement in childcare (and every 4 years thereafter).

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The program's license remains in full status. 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.