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

Name of Center: Essential Montessori **Enrollment:** 30 **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: 10-22-2024

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		2	13	5	20
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 01-01-2024 to 01-01-2026
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 11-21-2024

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 30.

Directress/Owner/On-site Supervisor of Essential Montessori is Constance "Connie" Craft. Ms. Craft has an AA degree and over 30 years experience in the Montessori primary classroom.

On 10/22/2024, program space was observed.

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 32nd 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 30 years 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. Since the last review, the program has obtained a new assistant staff who has previous early childhood experience.

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 with concessions, fund raising efforts (e.g. silent auction, HyVee receipts, For Small Hands, Book Clubs), trunk-or-treat experience, and many other seasonal celebrations. Ms. Craft indicated this is the first school year an official PTA has been established.

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 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 sunflowers and late summer fresh produce was seen on the outdoor area. There was also evidence of a clever outdoor "pumpkin dash" experience! Ms. Craft discussed how her quality program 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 fresh fruits and vegetables.

Essential Montessori has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. The school successfully navigated through the 2008 historic 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, 2023 air quality alerts and 7/19/24 global technology outage.

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. 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 autumn, native animals, Australia, and seasonal artwork. Children had access to an array of materials (e.g. books, building materials, puzzles, crafts) that encouraged innovative learning. Work lessons observed included immersive art, transferring, matching and patterning, pouring and world geography exploring. After work cycles, a group discussion was had. Group discussion included calendar (with color and work patterns), weather, singing (seasonal inspired songs). Afterwards, outdoor exploration with large gross motor work occurred. 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:

109.6(6). Record checks
- Staff file reviewed (MH, date of hire 9/9/24) lacked documentation of Iowa record check result and that a federal record check has been submitted.

109.9(1)d: All files contain a pre-employment physical exam report completed within six months prior to hire and at least every three years. Physical exams shall be documented on form 470-5152, Child Care Provider Physical Examination Report.
- Staff file reviewed (MH, date of hire 9/9/24) lacked documentation of a pre-employment/current physical exam with TB screening/testing on requested form 470-5152.

109.10(15)b: Emergency instructions, phone numbers, and diagrams for fire, tornado, and flood shall be visibly posted and documented at least once a month for fire and tornado. Records shall be maintained for current and previous year.
- Documentation of some monthly fire drills were not found on the day of the monitoring visit.

- Documentation of some monthly tornado drills were not found on the day of the monitoring visit.

109.11(3)d: Record of monthly inspections of outdoor recreation area and equipment shall be kept.
- Documentation of some monthly outdoor playground inspections were not found on the day of the monitoring visit.

109.11(7)c: All centers: Annual inspection prior to heating season of all fuel-burning appliances to reduce risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and shall install one carbon monoxide detector on each floor that conforms to UL Standard 2034.
- Documentation of a current annual fuel burning appliance inspection was not found on the day of the monitoring visit.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

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.