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

Name of Center: Montessori School of Marion **Enrollment:** 59 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 47556

Street: 420 Colton CIR NE Suite #2 **City:** Cedar Rapids Iowa **Zip** 52402 **County:** Linn

Mailing Address: 1464 Lindenbrook LN, Marion, IA, 52302

Director's Name: Aurora Costache **Phone Number:** 319-640-9178

On-Site Supervisor(s): Aurora Costache **E-Mail:** office@montessorischoolofmarion.org

Date(s) of Visit: 10-22-2024

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: 08-19-2024

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 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	14	2	38	6	60
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 11-01-2024 to 11-01-2026
	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:

Montessori School of Marion (MSM) is the only school in Iowa to be Accredited by the American Montessori Society. MSM is also an accredited nonpublic school with the Iowa Department of Education. MSM is a profit program owned and operated by Aurora Costache. MSM commenced operations in August, 2016. This program was originally located at Echo Hill Church located at 9000 C Ave NE in Marion. After the 8/10/2020 Derecho Storm, MSM had to temporarily relocate to St. Mark's Lutheran Church located at 8300 C Ave in Marion. On 7/12/2021, MSM relocated to their new current permanent home located at 420 Colton Circle NE in Cedar Rapids. MSM operates year-round Monday through Friday 8:00am to 6:00pm. MSM offers part-day and full-day programming opportunities for children age infant through 6-years-old. Current enrollment is 59.

The founder/directress Ms. Costache received a Bachelor of Applied Science in 2021and an AMS (American Montessori Society) diploma in 2005. Ms. Costache obtained a Certificate of Entrepreneurial Management and a Certificate of Leadership Studies in 2021. Ms. Costache is a current member of the American Montessori Society, has several years experience working with children locally as well as internationally, and continues to participate in much child development related training.

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

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

MSM is a well-established program located in a residential area of a predominantly urban community. MSM offers a variety of learning opportunities to help meet the needs of children and families throughout the community.

The mission of MSM is "...to serve our children and community with integrity to create thoughtful and independent citizens and leaders that our world needs..."

MSM has National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA) until 6/30/2028 and has Accreditation by the American Montessori Society (AMS) until 3/5/2027. MSM is a NCPSA Accredited non-public school with the Iowa Department of Education (for grades 1-3) and is the only school in Iowa to be Accredited by the AMS. AMS accreditation is the gold standard of Montessori school excellence indicating that a school meets rigorous standards of quality Montessori education and authenticity. Only about 15% of AMS member schools are AMS-accredited. As part of their AMS Accreditation, MSM submits annual reports updating their Strategic Plan in order to maintain their accreditation status.

MSM has the following website for families to learn more about the program: https://www.montessorischoolofmarion.org/. MSM was featured in past Marion Times News articles about MSM's celebration of diverse cultures as well as in an article entitled "Montessori School opens in Marion".

Ownership and management of MSM has remained consistent. Founding owner, school director, and lead CASA directress is Ms. Costache. Ms. Costache is currently celebrating the start of MSM's 9th school-year. Congratulations! Ms. Costache

is a local entrepreneur offering a small, personal Montessori program to the local community. Ms. Costache has continued goals for herself and her program. Ms. Costache has a Bachelor of Applied Science, achieved an Entrepreneurial certificate, and achieved a Leadership Certificate. Ms. Costache has an AMS diploma, an Associate Early Childhood Credential, and a certificate for Teaching Children with Learning Differences. Ms. Costache has used her Montessori training domestically in The United States as well as internationally in Canada, Japan, and Italy. Ms. Costache has a history of partnering with the Montessori Teaching Training Center in Tucson, Arizona. Ms. Costache is dedicated and organized. Ms. Costache has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed and maintained as required. Ms. Costache is familiar with licensing rules and regulations as well as those of MSM. Ms. Costache reported being appreciative of how "everything" in the program is outstanding and how she feels really good about being able to offer an exceptional program with well-trained invested staff.

Since the last monitoring visit, MSM has retained seasoned employees as well as hired a few new ones. Each lead directresses holds either a Bachelors, Masters, or PhD. Additionally, each directress has or is completing American Montessori Society (AMS) and Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) accredited training. Supporting teachers have all received or are completing Montessori training from the Center for Guided Montessori Studies (CGMS). The program supports community and family volunteerism offering children additional experiences in reading. MSM is in collaboration with UNI for persons interested in early learning and the Montessori teachings. Ms. Costache discussed having a hard work team of MSM staff who are dependable and help provide a great education for their students.

MSM has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. The school has 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.

MSM continues efforts at optimal communication between the program/staff and families. The program has an organized parent-staff/program information center, offers regular program newsletters, utilizes technological communication resources, offers parent education classes (e.g. Montessori +Me) and Montessori training, and supports family programming activities (e.g. Moms of Club of Marion). The program hosts various family events throughout the school-year including parent teacher conferences, Grandparent's Day, individual child birthday and International Day Celebration (e.g. heritage clothing encouraged, parade, international cuisine, musical songs in Spanish and French, cultural projects).

MSM building and grounds are pristine and well-maintained. Since the last review, air conditioning was replaced. Many unique features create a warm home-like environment. Classrooms are fully equipped and specifically designed with all the Montessori materials that are hands-on, self-correcting, and multi-sensorial. Materials are arranged in a purposeful manner and easily accessible to the children. Curriculum includes the Casa Program (3 to 6-years-old), the Bambini Program (1.5 to 3-years-old), and the Nido Program (10 weeks to 1.5-years-old). Since the last review, MSM expanded and remodeled a section of the building adding an accredited nonpublic school with the Department of Education (not part of this license) for children in grades 1st-3rd.

Ms. Costache discussed curriculum which is enriched by the Montessori Materials that support the child's development and is divided into the following areas: practical life, sensorial, language, math, geography, art, science, foreign language, music, peace, and grace and courtesy. Ms. Costache talked about how older children are provided opportunities to be the afternoon circle leader helping led music, story reading, and dismissal routines. After school programs begin at 3:15 each day. Enrichments and specialty clubs are also included in the curriculum incorporating the areas of dance/sports, cooking, crafts, ice skating, library, swimming, science, games, gymnastics and continued foreign language. Summer programing includes four 2-week sessions following a different curriculum based upon the topic. On-site guest speaker events and off-site field experiences are also part of the program. Outdoor environment supports a butterfly garden, flower gardens, fresh produce areas, shade with cooling mist and expanded seating for various activities including meals and snacks. Ms. Costache discussed goals related to a herb garden, fresh lavender, and spinach.

MSM collaborates well with many local partners including local business, CCR&R, health professionals, city officials, and local school districts.

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, directresses warmly greeted families and children as they arrived for the day. Classical music was quietly offered as children arrived and engaged in daily activities. Areas of October study were clearly visible throughout the classrooms and included fall season, pumpkins, spiders, and leaves. Nido room directresses were engaged in peg board work with infants and infant cares. Communication with infants occurred both verbally and through sign language. In the Bambini room, work included pumpkin matching, shape peg work, texture exploration, sorting and skilled craft. While working, one child in this room was overheard expressing joy about the morning's snack which included homemade banana muffins. The child stated "...those were yummy...I want you to make more..." A clear window mounted

bird feeder, positioned at child height, was observed to be filled with bird seed and uniquely attracting many winged friends for the Bambini children to be able to take a closer look! Work cycles in the Casa Program included writing, punch out work, human body/anatomy study, phonics, clay pot creation and pumpkin exploration. Directresses in all rooms were nurturing, attentive to the children's needs and utilized mindful discipline when needed. Directresses presented materials in a passionate manner. Directresses role modeled, demonstrated and observed the children offering assistance when needed (particularly during work cycles). Routine transitions (e.g. cleanup) 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:

Ongoing discussions (e.g. definition of "criblike") continue between MSM and licensing regarding rule 109.12(5). Please ensure MSM adheres to rule 109.12(5) which states "...A child care center serving children two weeks to two years old must provide an environment which protects the children from physical harm, but is not so restrictive as to inhibit physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development. a. Stimulation shall be provided to each child through being held, rocked, played with and talked with throughout the time care is provided. Insofar as possible, the same adult should provide complete care for the same child. b. Each infant and toddler shall be diapered in a sanitary manner as frequently as needed at a central diapering area. Diapering, sanitation, and hand-washing procedures shall be posted and implemented in every diapering area. There shall be at least one changing table for every 15 infants. c. Highchairs or hook-on seats shall be equipped with a safety strap which shall be engaged when the chair is in use and shall be constructed so the chair will not topple. d. Safe, washable toys, large enough so they cannot be swallowed and with no removable parts, shall be provided. All hard-surface toys used by children shall be sanitized daily. e. The provider shall follow safe sleep practices as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics for infants under the age of one. Requirements are as follows: (1) Infants shall always be placed on their backs for sleep. (2) Infants shall be placed on a firm mattress with a tight fitted sheet that meets U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission federal standards. (3) Infants shall not be allowed to sleep on a bed, sofa, air mattress or other soft surface. No child shall be allowed to sleep in any item not designed for sleeping including, but not limited to, an infant seat, car seat, swing, or bouncy seat. (4) No toys, soft objects, stuffed animals, pillows, bumper pads, blankets, or loose bedding shall be allowed in the sleeping area with the infant. (5) No co-sleeping shall be allowed. (6) Sleeping infants shall be actively observed by sight and sound. (7) If an alternate sleeping position is needed, a signed physician or physician assistant authorization with statement of medical reason is required. f. A crib or criblike furniture which has a waterproof mattress covering and sufficient bedding to enable a child to rest comfortably and which meets the current standards or recommendations from the Consumer Product Safety Commission or ASTM International for juvenile products shall be provided for each child under two years of age if developmentally appropriate. Crib railings shall be fully raised and secured when the child is in the crib. A crib or criblike furniture shall be provided for the number of children present at any one time. The center shall develop procedures for maintaining all cribs or criblike furniture and bedding in a clean and sanitary manner. There shall be no restraining devices of any type used in cribs.

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.