Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: St Matthew Early Childhood Center

Provider No.: 24466

Address: 2244 1st Ave NE, Cedar Rapids, IA, 52402

County: Linn

Director's Name: Sonya Benda

On-Site Supervisor: Heather Waddell, Co-Director

Phone Number: 3193639309

E-Mail: heather.waddell@crxcs.org
sonya.benda@crxcs.org
connie.schulte@crxcs.org

HHS Visit Date: 02/20/2025

Licensing Period: 02/01/2025 to 02/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 08/11/2025

Comments: Fire Captain Ben Kurka indicated on 11/3/2025 only item noted as not compliant was emergency responder radio coverage. There were portions of the building where emergency radios may not function adequately. This was determined to not have any negative effect on any other fire/life safety systems present throughout the building. The sprinkler and fire alarm systems remain fully functional and there are no egress concerns within the building. Additional fire/life safety components are also in place and fully functional, including but not limited to fire extinguishers, exit signage, emergency lighting, fire doors, and kitchen hood suppression systems. The process of evaluating emergency radio coverage typically occurs toward the end of a construction project, with amplifier system design and installation occurring after that. The contractor has provided updates that this is currently being completed. Once installed, fire marshal will complete a brief inspection to ensure that our radios function appropriately. Occupancy of the building was noted as being able to continue without restriction.

Report Visit Type:

- [ ] PTO
- [ ] Licensing Visit
- [ ] Drop In
- [X] Administrative Change

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

- [X] Year-Round
- [ ] School Year
- [ ] Summer Only

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Program Population Served:

- [X] Infant(0-<24 Months)
- [X] Toddler
- [X] PreSchool
- [X] School Age
- [X] All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	32	24	116	148	320
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

St. Matthew Early Childhood Center (ECC) is a non-profit program that has been in operation for several years. The St. Matthew ECC is located inside St. Matthew Catholic Elementary School. St. Matthew ECC functions under the jurisdiction of the St. Matthew Board of Education which consists of several elected members of the parish and the pastor. The program operates year-round Monday through Friday from 6:00am to 6:00pm. The program serves children age infant through school-age. Current enrollment is 229.

Xavier Catholic Schools executive childcare director is Connie Schulte. Ms. Schulte has been in this role since July 2024, has much licensed childcare center director experience and continues to participate in much child development related training. Co-Directors of St. Matthew ECC are Sonya Benda and Heather Waddell. Ms. Benda and Ms. Waddell have each been St. Matthew employees for several years before becoming co-directors in July 2022. Ms. Benda has over 20 years experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training. Co-director Heather Waddell has over 10 years experience working with children and also continues to participate in much child development related training.

On 2/20/2025, program space was observed.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

St. Matthew ECC is a well established program offering many different early learning opportunities to help meet the needs of families and children throughout the community. The program is located in a predominantly urban area.

St. Matthew ECC has the following website for families and the community to learn more about the program: http://www.stmatthewcr.org/ecc/.

St. Matthew's mission is to "...provide a Christian environment in which each child can grow spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually through age-appropriate activities. We are committed, in collaboration with families, to enhance each child's character development and nurture the individual strengths and talents that allow each child to reach their potential..."

St. Matthew ECC has a history of participation in quality initiatives including NAEYC, QRS and local quality initiatives. Possible future goals include IQ4K participation.

Ownership and management of St. Matthew ECC has remained consistent and seasoned. The program's management team (e.g. Ms. Schulte, Ms. Benda, Ms. Waddell) is professional and organized, and in turn, daily operations run smoothly. The

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management team has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed as required and maintained in a secure manner. The management team is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as their own program's policies and procedures.

Since the last monitoring visit, St. Matthew ECC has retained seasoned staff as well as hired a few new ones. Throughout the classrooms staff reported celebrating 14 years, 8 years, 7 years, and 2 years with St. Matthew ECC. Management discussed supporting staff's professional goals having some staff enrolled in TEACH and Wage$. Staff appreciation and displays of gratitude continue to be part of the program's success. Management continues to hold regular room meetings to review policies and procedures as well as for staff to share concerns and joys. Notes of gratitude and thank you for staff were observed to be posted in various area of the program space.

St. Matthew ECC is a ministry of St. Matthew Catholic Church. St. Matthew ECC is located inside a building that also houses the St. Matthew Elementary School and St. Matthew Preschool. All programs in the building are part of the Archdiocese of Dubuque. St. Matthew ECC operates under a school board. Church administration, school administration, St. Matthew Preschool, school custodial staff, the board, and school kitchen personnel help ensure the program space is sanitary and hazard free each day. The school kitchen is regularly inspected by the local health department. Program foods are prepared and provided year round by the school kitchen. The space is ADA accessible and an AED machine is on-site. Since the last review, some lighting was replaced, some restroom flooring was updated and new padded flooring areas established.

St. Matthew ECC has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. The program 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.

St. Matthew ECC 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. St. Matthew ECC offers a variety of annual family events, open houses, and parent/family conferences. The St. Matthew ECC has an active PTO (parent teacher organization). The PTO holds regular meetings, sponsors fundraising events, holds annual back to school events, and also sponsors family activities.

St. Matthew ECC has some unique features including temper resistant receptacles and door hinge finger shield guards. There is an established infant car seat storage area. Since the last review, several classrooms were re-arranged in a continued thoughtful manner keeping learning at the forefront. Children's accomplishments (e.g. artwork, milestone-feet fire trucks) are displayed throughout the program space. Materials are accessible to children. Curriculum includes Creative Curriculum, Biblical teachings, early academics, and teacher-inspired ideas. The curriculum historically also incorporates on-site guest speaker events, enrichment opportunities, off-site summer field trips, cooking experiences, gardening events, and STEAM activities.

St. Matthew ECC collaborates well with local partners including local businesses, local school districts, other local childcare programs, health professionals and CCR&R.

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 cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing. Cleaning supplies as well as cleaning checklists/reminders were observed on-site.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Areas of study include growing bodies. Activities observed were many (e.g. center play, book reading, circle discussion, indoor large gross motor) Children have access to an array of materials (e.g. books, imaginative play options, building materials, games, puzzles, sensory, crafts) that encouraged innovative play. Staff provided a companionable presence allowing children to have many choices in their play experiences. Routine transitions (e.g. clean up activities, meals rituals) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative play environment. Throughout the classrooms, staff were overheard providing children with meaningful discussion, positive redirection when needed and encouraging the use of social graces. A great window watching discussion was noted and overheard in room #205. Staff communicated with children verbally, with sign language and with picture cues. Children responded well to staff and appeared to be truly enjoying their day.

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3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

4. Any corrective action plans, provisional license, and safety plans-steps to get into compliance

Not applicable.

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Repair the cracked grey heavy plastic climbing wall steps attached to the outdoor climber.

Please continue to review handwashing procedures for staff and all children including infants (e.g. after diapering and rest-rooming, prior to all food services).

Ensure longer curtains attached to tension rods are inaccessible to children (e.g. infant room).

Continue to ensure all spray bottles (e.g. water, cleaners) are labeled with contents and instructions for use (e.g. dilution if applicable, dwell time).

Repair areas of chipping paint (e.g. classrooms, indoor large motor room).

Ensure all posted lesson plans are updated.

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A full license is issued. Thank you for the visit.

11/4/2025 - This report is to note an administrative change. An updated floor plan and fire marshal certificate with follow-up documentation has been received and reviewed. Primary program space has expanded to include a new additional cafeteria space. Total capacity has increased to 320 children.

Date: 11/04/2025

HHS Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons

Non-compliance with any of the mandated regulatory requirements listed above may lead to the cancellation or revocation of your Child Care License. Please take steps necessary to completely address each of the violations noted above.

Child Care Resource and Referral is an excellent resource for providers to access training options and support in your area. You can reach Child Care Resource and Referral at **https://iowaccrr.org**.