Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: UNI Child Development Center

Provider No.: 22665

Address: 1420 19th St, Cedar Falls, IA, 50614

County: Black Hawk

Director's Name: Maria Ackerson

On-Site Supervisor: Maria Ackerson

Phone Number: 3192733946

E-Mail: maria.ackerson@uni.edu

HHS Visit Date: 03/05/2026

Licensing Period: 04/01/2025 to 04/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 03/21/2024

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

- [ ] PTO
- [X] Licensing Visit
- [ ] Drop In
- [ ] 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
- [ ] School Age
- [ ] All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	16	16	60	0	92
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On 03/05/26 I made an unannounced off year licensing visit to UNI Child Development Center in Cedar Falls. I met with Maria Ackerson, the director. She became director on 09/26/22. Ms. Ackerson has a BA in social work. She was previously a director of a childcare center for five years and five additional years as an employee in a childcare center. The center employs ten lead teachers and 50 student staff members. Field experience students also work in the classrooms. Primary teachers have their BA or master's degrees. Lead staff members are University of Northern Iowa employees.

The program operates out of a building on the University of Northern Iowa campus. The center opened in its current location on 01/14/13. The program operates Monday through Friday from 7:30 am until 5:00 pm. It serves infants through preschool-aged children. There are currently 60 children enrolled. UNI faculty and students are given priority and then enrollment is open to the community.

The center is NAEYC accredited, and it expires on 01/01/29.

The center operates out of the following classrooms, Kittens (infants, birth until approximately 12-14 months), Cubs (12-14 months until two-years-old), Cats (18 months until two and one-half-year-olds), Pumas (two and one-half through three-year-old's), and Panthers (three and one-half through five-year-old's). Shelby Overmohle and Leann Perkins are the lead teachers in the Kitten Room. Taylor Baruth and Mevlina Beganovic are the lead teachers in the Cubs Room. Sadie Bertram and Breanna Murphy are the lead teachers in the Cats Room. Carly Stauffer and Melita Zejnic are the lead teacher in the Puma Room. Savannah Carroll and Robin Voster are the lead teachers in the Panthers Room.

An inspection of each room was completed. Children typically stay in the room until the completion of the semester or school year and then transition to the new room in the fall unless children must move up for numbers.

In the Puma room, once the children turn two-years-old they must be moved to the next room if there are children under the age of eighteen months in the room. Children who are under the age of eighteen months cannot be cared for in the same room as children two-years-old and older.

Windows provide natural lighting. The rooms are decorated with several pictures of the children and their families, the children's art projects, and posters to assist the children with the learning process, such as the alphabet, shapes, colors, numbers, and emotions. There is an area for circle time. The hallways are decorated with multiple pictures of the children and their artwork. The entrance is also decorated with artwork. There are pictures of the lead staff members near the office and outside of each room.

The centers observed on the day of the licensing visit include library, Lego/blocks, table toys, games, puzzles, Ipads,

transportation, play dough, puppets, art, dramatic play, listening, writing, math, science/discovery, woodworking, sensory table and music. Centers were arranged in a manner that allowed easy movement between activities, but it also allowed for clear supervision by staff members. Materials were in good condition. The materials are located at child level, so they are easily accessible to the children.

In the hallway outside the rooms there are large dry erase boards for the children to draw on. This is also where the children's lockers are located. Each locker has a picture of the child with his or her family.

The center uses Iowa Early Learning Standards to create lesson plans. The curriculum is based on accepted theories of child development such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Adler and Erickson. It is individualized to meet the needs of every child. Activities are developed around studies/themes. The length of the study depends on the subject and the children's interest level. The lead teachers in each room work together to develop their own lesson plans. The center has a website and the teachers each have their own blog where they keep parents informed of themes and activities. The program completes GOLD assessments in the fall, winter and spring. They complete a DECA assessment after four weeks of observation and ASQ assessments on all children under the age of four within 45 days. The Brigance Screening tool is used on four and five-year-old children.

The center uses the Brightwheel application for daily sheets. This app provides the parents with direct access to the information. The Brightwheel is also used to communicate with the parents from all classrooms. Staff members often send parents pictures and videos throughout the day.

Each room has access to cell phones. Emergency numbers with the center's address and phone number were posted in each room. Emergency fire and tornado procedures and evacuation diagrams were posted by all the main program doors and outdoor exits in the classrooms. A daily schedule was posted in each room. A lesson plan was available for review in each room.

I reviewed documentation of monthly fire and tornado drills. Each room keeps documentation of drills in their room. I reviewed documentation of monthly playground inspections. The radon test was completed in February 2025 and is good for five years. Results were within EPA guidelines. The fuel burning inspection was completed and no concerns were noted. A carbon monoxide detector is in the hallway on top of the lockers. Outlets were protected. The fire marshal inspection occurred on 03/21/24.

The program does not participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) but does follow the guidelines. The center provides the children with breakfast, lunch and a morning and afternoon snack. The center has a contract with the University of Northern Iowa dining center in the towers for lunch and the center prepares breakfast and snacks. They use a four-week rotation of menus.

Lunch dishes are placed through an industrial dishwasher in the on-site kitchen and dishes for breakfast and snacks are washed in the classrooms using the three-step method. There are three sinks in each room specifically for the purpose of washing dishes. There is a refrigerator in each of the rooms and thermometers were present. There is a refrigerator and chest freezer in the kitchen and thermometers were present.

Menus were posted in each of the rooms and the infant's feeding schedules were posted in the infant room. The center provides one brand of formula, baby food and cereal. Parents can provide their own if they prefer a different brand. The center will provide a different brand if there is a note from a doctor. There is a dishwasher in the infant room for dishes. They wash bottles using the three-step method in the room. Allergies and food preferences are posted in each room.

I observed diaper changes and proper procedures are followed.

The center uses Tesano Oxygenated Water SAO (Stabilized Aqueous Ozone) 24 to sanitize the food tables and disinfect the changing tables.

Cribs are used to nap in the infant room and they move over to cots when they turn one-year-old. The other rooms use cots to nap. Bedding was stored appropriately.

The parent information is located on a bulletin board inside each classroom. The mandatory reporter, childcare consultant and the handbook availability were posted. The license was conspicuously hung. A no-smoking sign was posted at the

entrance.

The children have use of the gym for gross motor activities.

The program has a large fenced-in playground area for the children. They do not have any climbing equipment. They have rubber tiles in an area where a ramp was once located. The rubber tiles are in poor condition. Some are loose, curling, they provide an uneven walking surface, and there are large gaps between many of them causing a tripping hazard. Ms. Ackerson has made UNI aware of this situation. They need donations to make repairs. There is a sandbox. There is a nice bike path through the area. There is a woodworking center, playhouses, a tunnel and stumps for the children to walk on. There are bird feeders for the children to enjoy the birds and benches for the children to rest. There is a stage area and a large sensory area with several activities. There is an ice cream truck for the children to play in and the university is adding a new sandbox and mud kitchen in the spring.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The leadership of the program is committed to providing a safe environment for the children. Staff members had terrific interaction with the children in each room. They made the learning environment fun and inviting. Staff members are enthusiastic and it came across in how they taught and interacted with the children. They interacted with the children at their level and offered them choices. They were flexible but maintained a routine for the children. Staff members had great teamwork. They each have jobs and roles within the classrooms and know what to expect from one another. Staff members provided easy to understand and clear directions for the children. They provided the children with praise and a calm environment and used positive redirection when necessary. Staff members change out centers routinely so that children do not get bored. Staff members modeled good manners for the children. They included children in activities and encouraged them to use their imaginations. They provided the children with good handwashing reminders and several of them sang with the children as they washed their hands. Children appeared to enjoy their time at the program.

The center is NAEYC accredited that expires in January 2029.

There are pictures of the lead staff members outside each of the classrooms. The hallways of the center are decorated with the children's art project and their lockers have a picture of their family.

The program is in a secure building.

Ms. Ackerson states they received the Growing Iowa Grant and they purchased a new rocking chair for each classroom.

Ms. Ackerson states they maintain strong, well trained and consistent staff members. They are dedicated to the children. They go above and beyond for the children and the center.

The center participates in the WAGES program. Six staff members receive WAGES.

Ms. Ackerson states the center hosts a family event each semester. For example, they have had an ice cream social and an "all nations" event. She states they do this to build strong connections with the families.

Ms. Ackerson states the CCA Retention Program has been great. This allows all staff members to qualify for CCA regardless of their household income. She believes they would have lost one of their teachers without it.

Ms. Ackerson states the childcare center partners with other departments on campus (such as the Drama Department, Literacy Department, Social Work, Construction Club) which opens a lot of different possibilities. They partner with the Regents Center to work with infants and toddlers.

Ms. Ackerson sates they partner with the Jacobson Center to provide professional development opportunities. She states her lead teachers are continuously doing professional development and they go above and beyond expectations.

Ms. Ackerson states the full time staff members are UNI employees and they received UNI benefits and IPERS.

Ms. Ackerson states she has a goal of spending more time in the classrooms and with the teachers doing observations. She

states she is always so impressed with their teachers and has never wanted to change anything.

Ms. Ackerson states she has a passion for early childhood.

Ms. Ackerson states she hears other programs struggle with staffing and she is blessed for this not to be a concern. She states that it is not a stress they face and it is great for the children and parents too.

Ms. Ackerson states they have consistent children and staff members in the classrooms.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

There are no citations.

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

N/A

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

A full license is issued for the remainder of the licensing period. All HHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period.

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management:
I discussed with Ms. Ackerson, the director, their oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) Understand expectations, 2) managing frustrations, 3) monitor performance. Ms. Ackerson states they have an all-staff meeting at the beginning of the school year and at the meeting they discuss behavior management and frustration. She states the lead teachers have “semester meetings” in the fall and spring with their student staff members to discuss expectations.

Ms. Ackerson states she has never witnessed a lead teacher or student staff member have a concern. There are always two lead teachers in the classrooms. If there was a concern with a student staff member the lead teacher would address it. Ms. Ackerson states she visits the classrooms frequently and she gets to know their student staff members well. She expects the lead teachers to report it to her if they have any concerns. She states that their teachers attend a social-emotional conference every spring to learn how to deal with children’s behaviors.

Date: 03/12/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Becky Frost

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**.