

Dr. Kenneth Elgersma, Chair Faculty Senate
University of Northern Iowa
April 22, 2025

Dear Dr. Elgersma and Senators,

I am honored to write this letter of support for Ms. Denise Tallakson in her application for Emeritus status at the University of Northern Iowa.

Ms. Tallakson has served as an instructor and assistant professor of instruction at the University of Northern Iowa for the past 38 years, first serving at the Malcolm Price Laboratory School from 1986-2011 and later in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction from 2011-2025. She taught in grades 1-2 for four years in the Paradise Valley School District prior to coming to Cedar Falls. Ms. Tallakson is currently teaching courses in integrating arts in elementary classrooms and has also taught elementary curriculum, and more recently worked on the development and teaching team in the Purple Pathway for Paraeducators. She plans to continue with the Purple Pathway for Paraeducators in her retirement.

Ms. Tallakson, a life long learner, has engaged in faculty development offerings throughout her career, but beginning from 1982 until today, engaging in continuous development in instructional materials and curriculum, strategy, and a wide array of technology skills and book studies. She has been recognized by students as an advocate for second year students, transfer friendliness and student organization advisor of the year in 2015. She received the Gold Star Teacher Award for Outstanding Teaching in 2010 and the Apple Polisher Award in 2012. Students also express appreciation for her support of women's basketball and women's softball

Ms. Tallakson has produced eight collaborative publications through the peer review process and has received grants in the amount of \$34,135 over the course of her work at UNI. She has given four national/international presentations, 56 regional, state, and local presentations targeting K-6 teachers and 7 teaching workshops for area teachers.

Ms. Tallakson is an early innovator with colleagues to experiment with professional development schools with colleagues in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, partnering with multiple schools in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo community. She advised the *Art for El Salvador* student organization and fund-raised with the students, raising \$25,000 to build a school in Mediagua, El Salvador. She led a UNI delegation of 17 students to El Salvador to see the school and volunteer while there delivering supplies and scholarships to students to attend high school. Out of this impactful program grew the *Dress a Girl Project* that began in 2023 and continues to make more than 100 dresses that were sent to El Salvador.

Ms. Tallakson has contributed to the local community through Camp Activ8, Creativity Community Night, a collaboration of Gallagher Bluedorn and the Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy. She also served on the Gallagher Bluedorn Children's Events Committee and the Kaleidoscope Connections committee from 2009-2015. Ms. Tallakson was a leader for Career Education Day, a joint project between UNI and Blackhawk Country Elementary Schools, that provided experiences for 1st graders visiting UNI from 1994-2000. She also advised the summer literacy program at the Country Terrace Mobile Home Park over three summers from 2015-2017.

Ms. Tallakson's colleagues and friends will feel the loss of her enthusiastic spirit and ready willingness to go the extra mile for students and peers. We wish her well in her retirement and appreciate her continuing to engage with us as she transitions into retirement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robin Dada". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robin" and last name "Dada" clearly distinguishable.

Robin Dada
Dept. Head
Department of Curriculum and Instruction