

PREMIER



The Real Deal: From Para to Educator

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Premier is published by the University of Northern Iowa College of Education for its alumni, friends, faculty and staff.

Dean:
Colleen S. Mulholland, EdD

Editor:
Stacy McGauvran-Hruby

Writing:
Lindsey Giardino
Stacy McGauvran-Hruby

Design:
Sarah Judisch

Photography:
Elliot Tensen
Sean O'Neal

Please send comments, suggestions and story ideas to:

Premier Editor
University of Northern Iowa
College of Education
SEC 150
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0610

coedeansoffice@uni.edu

Read Premier online at coe.uni.edu/premier.

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FROM THE DEAN



Dear Friends,

As you read this, we're fully immersed in another dynamic and vibrant academic year. While we're eager about our goals for this year, I'm thrilled to take a moment to look back and recognize the hard work and dedication of our faculty and staff, who made last year's achievements possible. As this issue shares, we have plenty to shout about:

- Our first **Purple Pathway for Paraeducators graduates** – all 62 of them!
- **Increased access to a unified early childhood education major**, including (another) new online option for placebound students.
- A **recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership program extending education outdoors** while refining its master's program.
- An **overachieving** *Our Tomorrow: The Campaign for UNI* – whose impact for the college includes a newly-endowed professorship.
- A **literacy initiative that's making a difference** in classrooms across Iowa.
- **Steady enrollment** bolstered by the impact of innovative new programming.

This year also involved the detailed work of curricular revision for 40+ majors and minors throughout all of UNI Teacher Education, an effort that began in spring 2022. This entailed intensive collaboration among faculty, department heads, deans and academic support offices across campus — and our work continues.

That brings us to this coming year. The final phase of our curricular work is now underway, concentrating on implementation as we finalize approvals for the curriculum. We are excited to share with our educator preparation alumni the significant changes designed to enhance student accessibility to the teaching profession, starting in the 2025-26 school year.

So we've been busy! And, we are ready to re-engage the dialogue within the college about our organizational structure following the re-alignment of health-related programs in 2023. We're now primed to find the synergies within our structure that will elevate and strengthen the future of the college.

We also expect:

- Intensified efforts to build our research capabilities and create positive synergy in graduate recruitment among a new COE Office of Graduate Studies and Research and our academic departments, programs and faculty.
- Completion of the final phase of the TEACH (Teacher Education and Collaboration Hub) project, leading to a transformation of the Instructional Resources and Technology Services space (IRTS) to house the UNI youth collection in a hub for teacher preparation and classroom experimentation.

These highlights from the 30,000-foot-view reflect just a slice of the commitment, passion and dedication emanating from every corner of the college. They support our vision to foster a thriving culture, elevate the college internally and externally and build and sustain enrollment growth for long-term success.

Importantly, we do this work together. Whether you're among our alumni, donors, friends, faculty, staff or students, our connections matter. As we continue to chart our future and help others achieve their dreams, thank you for being part of our story, our legacy and our tomorrow.

Colleen Mulholland
Dean, College of Education



THE

REAL DEAL:

FROM PARA TO EDUCATOR

New pathways add fresh faces to the teaching workforce

Davette Watson has always dreamed of becoming a teacher.

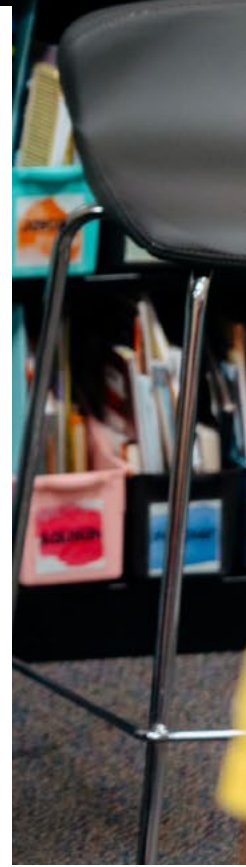
But, as it sometimes does, life got in the way.

A little over a decade ago, after graduating from Hawkeye Community College, Watson enrolled at UNI as a general studies major with a minor in health promotions. Her goal was to work in health care to help find a cure for sickle cell anemia — a disease that her father, who's now deceased,

lived with his entire life.

In addition to her studies, Watson was juggling a full-time job and raising her kids as a single parent. She decided to put her education on pause so she could focus more on her family and work. In September 2010, she took a role as a paraeducator — a job she thoroughly enjoyed.

Two years ago, Watson learned of UNI's Purple Pathway for Paraeducators bachelor of arts program. This accelerated, online,





there have been a few bumps along the way, but the staff and instructors provided support and guidance. What I've enjoyed most is the friendships I've created with fellow students in my cohort. Despite the virtual setting, we've been able to connect, collaborate and support each other throughout the journey."

Most importantly, though, Knox feels great satisfaction knowing she's been working toward a career in which she can positively impact students' lives. This fall, she began her first teaching role as a middle school special education teacher in her hometown of Waukon, Iowa.

"The Purple Pathway program is an excellent opportunity for those serious about returning to school and getting an education degree while requiring flexibility in their day," she says. "Being able to incorporate my daily work experiences and roles into coursework and assignments contributed to

practice-based program enables paraeducators who are interested in becoming a licensed elementary education teacher in Iowa to do so in two years.

"This was my second chance to be able to make my dream of becoming a teacher come true," Watson says. "The classes being taught online were helpful as I balanced being a full-time mom, wife and employee at school along with being in college."

While Watson admits she's experienced a roller coaster of emotions throughout the past couple years with long nights, Saturday classes and challenging assignments, she's had an "amazing support system" through the Purple Pathway program, including her professors.

Watson graduated with her bachelor's degree in elementary education this past May and accepted a classroom teaching position at Dr. Walter Cunningham School for Excellence in

Waterloo, Iowa — the same school where she served as a paraeducator.

"I am excited to start this new journey and give back to the community I was born and raised in," she says.

Ashley Knox



Like Watson, **Ashley Knox** has always enjoyed being around and working with

children. In 2014, she began her journey in education as a teacher associate in a four-year-old preschool classroom. A few years later, she became a paraeducator in the Decorah Community School District.

"Being a paraeducator allowed me to work a schedule similar to that of my three children and support students' learning and growth," Knox says. "I knew I wanted to be a teacher at some point in my life, and being a para was a great

start in following my love for education and helping students."

When she learned of the Purple Pathway program, it seemed like too good of an opportunity to pass up, so she took a leap and went for it.

"My experience in the Purple Pathway program has been both challenging and rewarding," Knox says. "Like any college experience,

"What I've enjoyed most is the friendships I've created with fellow students in my cohort. Despite the virtual setting, we've been able to connect, collaborate and support each other throughout the journey."

“Through the Purple Pathway program, I have been able to connect and learn from some of the best teachers in the Cedar Valley at Orchard Hill Elementary.”

my professional learning in school and the workplace in a way I’m not sure I would have gotten out of a regular online degree.”

Sam Schnell

Similar to Watson and Knox, **Sam Schnell** has always been good with kids, but her pathway to working with them hasn’t been linear. She graduated high school in

2012, attended Wartburg College for two years and then transferred to UNI for elementary education. At that time, Schnell experienced some mental health issues and took some time off of school to figure out what she wanted to do. She worked as a lead teacher at a daycare for four years, got accepted into Hawkeye Community College for its physical therapy assistant program

and graduated in 2021.

While studying for her boards, Schnell needed to find a job to bridge the gap. She reached out to the principal at Orchard Hill Elementary in Cedar Falls, who she’d met through a mutual friend, to see if they had any openings for paraeducators. The answer was yes.

For the past few years, Schnell worked as a para — a time during which she found a new passion.

“Being around kids all day who have access to additional

support is where my heart is,” she shares. “I always knew I loved kids and wanted to be around them all day. But when I left UNI in 2015, I never in a million years thought I would end up being a teacher.”

Now, that’s exactly what she can call herself.

Schnell received her bachelor’s degree in elementary education this past spring through the Purple Pathway program and began as a special education teacher at Southdale Elementary in Cedar Falls this fall.

“We’ve heard from the apprentices and building administrators that, without this program, the paraeducators wouldn’t have been able to achieve their goal of becoming a teacher.”

“I am super thankful to have been given this opportunity to find my true calling in life through being a paraeducator,” Schnell says. “Through the Purple Pathway program, I have been able to connect and learn from some of the best teachers in the Cedar Valley at Orchard Hill Elementary. Cedar Falls does an amazing job of hiring well-rounded educators to teach the future of our society, and I am beyond blessed to have been able to learn from so many of them.”

Rewards of seeing program impact

Likewise, **Kristine Donnelly**, Purple Pathway coordinator, sees great value in the program and the impact it can have on the lives of aspiring teachers like Watson, Knox and Schnell – all of whom were part of the first class of 62 program graduates.

“The program is absolutely heartwarming and so rewarding,” she says. “We’ve heard from the apprentices and building administrators

that, without this program, the paraeducators wouldn’t have been able to achieve their goal of becoming a teacher.”

Overall, while program improvements and adjustments are ongoing, Donnelly feels the Purple Pathway program has been successful and hopes to see continued interest from paraeducators of all backgrounds.

In this way, the program can help address the teacher shortage – one of the reasons it was started in the first place.

Tara Estep, executive director of enrichment and special programs for Cedar Falls Community Schools, partnered with staff at UNI to launch the program, knowing how critical the work of paraeducators is to students’ success and that some paras aspired to the next level of teaching.

“Being able to pour into our paras and support those dreams has been great,” she says.

‘GROW YOUR OWN’ Making an Impact

The Purple Pathway to Paraeducators is one of several innovative programs showing results as UNI partners with school districts and educational organizations through a “grow your own” approach.

Purple Pathway for School Administrators launched in 2023 in partnership with the Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS), with an emphasis on the UNI Principalship Program (MAE/ASC), which can lead to various administrative positions within a district. This dedicated cohort drew 12 participants in its first year. All 12 will qualify for a conditional PK-12 principalship and evaluators license (Iowa endorsements #189 and #190) by the end of the calendar year, according to **Kenneth Hayes**, principalship program coordinator.

“It’s going great. There are lots of good conversations about curriculum, leadership and the Des Moines Public Schools’ vision for its incoming leaders. The cohort is already beginning to be tightly connected and feeling like a family of leaders,” he reports. “This group of aspiring administrators will be a great addition to the administrative team at DMPS.”

DMPS plans for a second principalship cohort to start in fall 2025 and has since committed five of its current administrators to enroll in the fall 2024 Doctor of Education (EdD) program, reflecting another extension of the grow-your-own concept.

The **Grow Your Own School Psychologist** program began in consultation with Green Hills AEA and has continued with several AEA partners, including Central Rivers AEA, as part of two five-year U.S. Department of Education grants coordinated by the UNI School Psychology program. The primarily online program is in its fifth year. Eight graduates have earned their educational specialist degrees and 11 students are currently in year one or year two of their program. Graduates are currently working at the Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency and the Green Hills Area Education Agency.

Two funding initiatives have supported diversifying the workforce in the Waterloo Community School District. Through **Teach Waterloo**, funded by the R.J. McElroy Trust, the Waterloo Schools Foundation and John Deere Waterloo Operations, 11 fellows have graduated since the program launched in 2018 as a partnership between UNI and the WCSD. Recent graduates completed their studies as part of the Purple Pathway for Paraeducators.

Lead Waterloo, launched in 2023 as an expansion of Teach Waterloo, supports future leaders from within WCSD as they complete the UNI Principalship Program. One student completed his degree this past summer, while the other five entered their second year of the program in fall 2024.

EXTENDING EDUCATION *outdoors*

Education doesn't just happen within the confines of a classroom.

In fact, if you take a look around, education happens nearly everywhere, from museums to adventure tourism companies and environmental nonprofits to local recreation centers and beyond.

Likewise, UNI's recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership (RTNL) degree (previously known as the leisure, youth and human services major) emphasizes the aspect of taking education outdoors — an intrinsic part of the major.

"By integrating outdoor education into their programs, courses in the RTNL major enhance the learning experience and prepare students to be effective educators and leaders in environmental and adventure education," says **Kathy Scholl**, Health, Recreation and Community Services department head and RTNL faculty member.

Another side of education

What exactly is outdoor education? Think of a child walking through the woods on a field trip to a local nature preserve. They encounter a fallen tree and climb up on it. They walk the

length of the tree as if it's a beam.

In doing so, they're improving their balance and they're encountering the environment. They may ask questions like, "What might have happened to make this tree fall?" or "What kinds of insects do I see crawling underneath the trunk?"

Essentially, outdoor education is a way to build skills and develop knowledge while exploring and discovering the outdoors.

Students working toward the RTNL degree, particularly those focusing on recreation, benefit from outdoor education for numerous reasons. First and foremost,

it offers a dynamic learning environment, encouraging experiential learning and engaging multiple senses and learning styles. This makes the major more inclusive and effective for diverse learners.

Students also prepare for real-world challenges by simulating unpredictable outdoor scenarios, which

"Watching students grow and develop leadership skills and confidence as they spend time learning from staff and participating in programs makes the partnerships meaningful. Community organizations are essential to providing real-world hands-on experiences that help students become well-rounded professionals."

Amy Davison



requires adaptability and resilience.

One way they do so is through hands-on learning at places across campus, including the UNI Biological Preserves and Trails and the Tallgrass Prairie Center.

Scholl shares that the RTNL program engages students in service-learning projects whenever possible. For example, a group of students recently helped decommission a trail at Hartman Reserve Nature Center in Cedar Falls that wasn't to be used by visitors.

Alumni perspectives

Amy Davison ('95, BA, '17, EdD), manager of Hartman Reserve Nature Center, enjoys partnering with UNI students because they bring new ideas, creativity and energy.

"I love working with students to see them become passionate about a particular topic or program," she says. "Watching students grow and develop leadership skills and confidence as they spend time learning from staff and participating in programs makes the partnerships meaningful. Community organizations are essential to providing real-world hands-on experiences that help students become well-

rounded professionals."

One such professional is **Ryan Harkema**, who received his master's degree in leisure services in 2004. He currently serves as recreation superintendent for the City of Ankeny's Parks and Recreation Department.

"When I think of taking education outdoors, I lump all that parks and recreation has to offer under that umbrella," he says. "From over 45 different parks, to the various indoor and outdoor sports leagues and programs we offer, to the awesome number of contracted programs we are able to offer through partnerships and people who have expertise in a wide range of topics, we are able to combine all that recreation has to offer under one umbrella."

Harkema still recalls the foundation UNI helped him lay in the profession.

"What the master's program did for me was help me better understand the 'why' behind things, how to critically think and analyze situations and life in general," Harkema shares.

Preparing for a career

Sydney Welte, a spring 2024 RTNL graduate, had the opportunity to work with Harkema as an intern last spring, through which she helped plan outdoor events and coordinate youth programs like the Father-Daughter Dance and Tumble Tots.

As a UNI student, Welte immersed herself deeply in outdoor education as a trip coordinator through



Ryan Harkema, left, and Sydney Welte

the Outdoor Education Leadership Alliance.

"I learned how to plan, problem-solve, observe participant morale, and map the fundamentals of risk management," Welte says. "Being a trip coordinator was a great way for me to meet a community and gain experience leading groups of people."

While she isn't entirely sure where her career path will lead her, Welte feels her RTNL degree is versatile enough to give her a plethora of options.

According to Scholl, indeed it will. The job market for an RTNL grad is full of outdoor education careers, including adventure tourism guide,

"Being a trip coordinator was a great way for me to meet a community and gain experience leading groups of people."

environmental educator, park ranger and geographic information systems specialist.

For Welte, being an RTNL student enabled her to be surrounded by people who care about the outdoors as much as she does.

"Through the program, I enjoyed the people the most," Welte shares. "Everyone I met was hard working, kind, funny, and passionate about providing for the community in one way, shape, or form."



Finding the Balance in Well-Being

Definitions of well-being vary by background, by discipline and by generations. The Oxford dictionary defines well-being as: *the state of being comfortable, healthy and happy*. Several College of Education faculty describe well-being as:

- Involving physical and emotional health.
- Living a lifestyle that optimizes five core wellness dimensions: physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and emotional.
- Including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth.
- The state of feeling content that leads to job satisfaction and meaningful connections with students, families and co-workers.
- A subjective concept encompassing a healthy balance of personal responsibilities, life tasks and work demands that optimize self-care and joy.



However interpreted, elements of this concept permeate the academic experience across the College of Education. Whether preparing students to lead tomorrow's classrooms, to enhance lives within a community, to advance into leadership or to advise future students, a common strand is an education which is mindful of well-being in learning, preparation and, eventually, practice.

And while not new-so-new, there is heightened awareness and focus on this side of teaching and learning as a result of the real repercussions of COVID-19 and other stressors in today's world.

When trends and events collide: COVID-19 and mental health

College of Education faculty cite the intersection of mental

health and COVID-19 as a primary factor for a greater focus on well-being.

"While child and adolescent well-being began to increase before the pandemic, the focus on well-being was heightened during and since the pandemic. Children and adolescents are experiencing a mental health crisis, and educators observe the consequences of this every day," notes **Nicole Skaar**, professor, school psychology. "This is driving the interest in many educators to learn more about social and emotional learning (SEL), trauma-informed educational practices and school-based mental health strategies and systems."

Shelley Price-Williams, assistant professor, postsecondary education: student affairs, says multiple factors have made well-being more salient, including less stigma and greater transparency around mental health and its magnitude.

"The current generation in college has been exposed to more natural disasters and mass shootings than any prior," she says, "Finally, COVID-19 stressed well-being as individuals worked to navigate isolation, financial

"There has been an increased focus on the mental health needs of children and youth, as well as teacher stress and burnout. This minor addresses both of these areas."

and housing instability, and mortality through the loss of loved ones for possibly the first time in their lives."

The result? Affirmation of the need for skills that can apply to teaching, leading and working with others. And, recognition that such skills are critical for today's practitioners for their own personal and professional well-being.

SEL minor, conference meet needs

The addition of the college's Social and Emotional Learning Conference and a social and emotional learning minor, both new in 2022, are two tangible responses to growing needs.

With the minor, pre-service teachers gain the knowledge needed to integrate SEL into their classrooms in a way that is developmentally appropriate while learning skills to increase their own well-being.

Building on existing requirements for education majors, the minor adds a social and emotional learning seminar and offers electives in areas such as conflict resolution, social psychology

and even interpersonal forgiveness. Students also participate in external learning events such as workshops focused on school mental health.

"Research indicates the numerous benefits of including social emotional learning in schools," says **Kerri Clopton**, associate professor, school psychology, who was among those partnering with colleagues in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction to create the curriculum. "There has been an increased focus on the mental health needs of children and youth, as well as teacher stress and burnout. This minor addresses both of these areas."

Looking at SEL from both the student and teacher perspective was part of the impetus for launching the Social and Emotional Learning Conference.

"The idea of social and emotional learning has been around since the early 1990s, so it's not new. There has become more of an awareness that students come to our schools with social and emotional needs," Skaar says. "As the social and emotional



“Well-being in school leadership takes in the conscious consideration of mental health and supports for those in our care.”

needs of students have come into focus, we have also been reminded to consider and support the social and emotional needs of educators.”

“It was especially evident during and after COVID-19 that teachers and their students could benefit from more about the topic,” notes **Denise Tallakson**, associate professor of instruction, curriculum and instruction. “Increasing teacher burnout and the rise in mental health concerns are reasons this conference is so important for educators.”

The coursework and conference have struck a chord. The SEL minor is now the second most popular minor at UNI. Similarly, the SEL conference annually attracts hundreds of pre-service and in-service teachers, faculty and others, such as social workers, counselors and school psychologists.

A conscious consideration for school leaders

What is good for teachers is good for administrators and board members as well, says **Mary Sult**, assistant professor, educational leadership, who also directs the Institute for Educational

Leadership, which works with current leaders and school boards.

“Well-being in school leadership takes in the conscious consideration of mental health and supports for those in our care. The shift in education to a whole-child concept is not that new in Iowa; however, the shift to consider the whole employee is a more recent development,” she says.

Sult likens recognition of the benefit of emotionally healthy school leaders and staff to societal shifts in accepting self-care for others. “Society has made room and even embraced a mothers’ need for self-care in order for her to be a better mother for her children. The old martyr mentality has mostly been disrupted and now there is a shift for our educational leaders and teachers as well.

“A healthy, happy, emotionally safe staff has a lot more to offer our students than those who are not. So when we ask what’s best for the students, we have a little more perspective on serving the needs of teachers and administrators as well,” Sult says.

Educational leadership students complete a wellness plan. “They draft goals and

supporting activities to help them become more mentally and physically fit in order to better establish a leadership-life fit,” Sult says. “Our department believes that school leaders need to be cognizant of the mental health needs of the adults in their supervision alongside those needs of our students.”

Aspiring principals learn more about the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) CatchLife wellness program during a seminar. “The program, initially started by our colleague **Roark Horn**, helps to jumpstart or refine mental and physical well-being, specifically thinking deeply about the stressors that go into school leadership,” Sult says.

The benefits of self-care and leisure

Rod Dieser is a professor in recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership and licensed mental health counselor whose academic perspective encompasses the benefits of leisure and self-care. His students have chosen careers that contribute to well-being — whether that’s leading youth agencies, supervising local parks and recreation programming or coordinating events for the regional tourism bureau.

In addition to discovering the in’s and out’s of these future roles, Dieser’s students learn the value of self-care as part of a seminar prior to student internships. “A self-care plan is a thoughtfully constructed and intentional wellness guide to promote health and well-being,” he says.

Dieser has researched the importance of what he calls an “optimal leisure lifestyle” within self-care plans. While studying the founders of the Mayo Clinic, he learned that they never seemed to experience burnout as they created the world-renowned clinic. “What I learned was how deeply they were engaged in serious leisure pursuits that seemed to buffer any type of burnout features,” he says.

These are among research findings Dieser shares with his students as he encourages them to think of their health as well as that of their clients and community.

“As a licensed mental health counselor, I believe engagement in an optimal leisure lifestyle has so many health benefits,” he says. “Serious leisure can result in self-actualization, personal growth and happiness, life satisfaction, increased levels of confidence, skills and self-esteem, friendship, sense of community, belonging and in discovering meaning in life.”

Concern – and change – for student affairs

Coursework and experiential learning in student affairs focus on skills for college roles ranging from admissions to financial aid to advising. When Price-Williams arrived at UNI, she saw an opportunity to further develop interpersonal helping skills to support students both professionally and as individuals balancing life roles and academic work.

“I designed a new course in professional helping in which students refine their micro-

helping skills and expand their knowledge of current challenges encountered by college students, particularly related to mental health,” she explains. Coursework includes developing cultural competencies and skills in navigating crises, developing rapport and empathy, active listening and using and interpreting nonverbal communication. Other activities prioritize self-care and empower students with strategies for balance and wellness.

“These skills are pivotal to advising and supporting college students. Though not trained to become professional counselors, our students acquire effective helping skills that enable them to identify student needs and make appropriate referrals to support offices on campus,” she says. And, they support these graduate students as well.

“One lesson I teach is that a helper must be well to help others,” she notes.

The student affairs students report greater confidence in their abilities. That’s welcome news at a time when current practitioners face increased workloads and stress following an exodus of student affairs professionals after COVID-19. “The stress and anxiety for professionals persist. Well-being continues to be something for which all strive,” she says.

Opportunity – and challenge – for school psychologists

In the school setting, one group of professionals is particularly primed to lead



and support in this area: school psychologists.

“School psychologists *are* mental health providers in schools. Often we are the professionals with the most training in social, emotional, and behavioral health in the building,” says Skaar, a coordinator of the state’s leading school psychology program. “School psychologists are trained to support system level reforms for SEL and mental health, to assess these areas of functioning, and to provide social, emotional and behavioral health interventions for individuals and groups.”

Though awareness of the profession has risen, Skaar says opportunity remains to impact the educational experiences for students, teachers, families and school leaders. With ratios in Iowa of one school psychologist for every 1,900 students—compared to the recommended one for every

RESEARCHING SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

Investigators are in the final stages of exploring the effectiveness of providing a multi-tiered system of support to educators to reduce burnout, increase job satisfaction and increase knowledge and skills in responding to social situations in teaching. The effort was funded by a two-year, \$250,000 grant from the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health at the University of Iowa.

Kerri Clopton, College of Education, and Darcie Davis-Gage, previously with the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, have been testing a multi-tier system of support involving the Adult Resilience Curriculum for Educators (ARC); virtual psychoeducational groups focused on topics related to those in the ARC; and individual telehealth counseling for additional intensive support.

In the first year, they offered up to three levels of support to four schools and one cohort of student teachers, and in the second year, to three schools and two cohorts of student teachers.

“The results will help us make adjustments to improve the efficacy of the program,” says Clopton, who expected to complete data analysis this past summer. “At this point, we know we need to develop a Tier 2 support that is less time intensive for educators. Their time is valuable—and limited—so we are considering methods of support that require smaller periods of time.”

500—the caseload for today’s professionals often limits their focus.

“School psychologists have the necessary training and could be leaders of educator well-being initiatives in schools. Unfortunately, their caseloads are too large to be able to spend meaningful time supporting educators and leading systems change that will improve educator well-being. At this time, they provide support for teacher well-being as they collaborate on educational evaluations and student services, but this work is ad hoc and not systemic,” says Skaar.

Through a federal grant-funded “grow your own” program, the UNI School Psychology program is working to add more school psychologists in rural school districts via Area Education Agency partners. And, across the residential and GYO programs, they are taking a more balanced approach in training new professionals.

“We are spending more time talking about educator mental health while we also train on student behavior and



mental health. We are aware of the increasing stressors on educators, especially those who work with students with disabilities,” she says.

Impacting people and professions

As students move into practice, COE faculty envision positive outcomes from an enhanced focus on well-being, social and

emotional learning and mental health.

From the self-care vantage point, “I see a professional who can say ‘no’ to extra work demands or engagements in order to sustain their wellness activities. It is learning to pick between good, better or best, sometimes saying ‘no’ to good events – an extra work meeting – in order to engage in better activities, such as exercising or spending time with your family members,” says Dieser.

“Teaching is a stressful profession. If a teacher has learned strategies to regulate their own emotions, they will be more effective in working with a student who is having difficulty regulating their emotions and behavior,” says Clopton.

Price-Williams notes: “At any time on any day in higher education work, a

professional may encounter a student in need or crisis. The incorporation of these skills into everyday practice prepares practitioners for instances where a student might exhibit intense affect or demonstrate a recognizable change in behavior and emotion. These skills also underpin more effective communication with peers and institutional leadership.”

Research on adverse childhood experience (ACE) factors and physical changes in a child’s brain shared by Mark Sander, co-director of the Midwest Center for Mental Health and keynote speaker at the SEL conference, was “astounding,” says Tallakson. “Educators face these issues every day. Understanding the research and having strategies to help students develop SEL skills can help all students be successful in school and life.”

“Understanding the research and having strategies to help students develop SEL skills can help all students be successful in school and life.”



A UNIFIED PATH

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Preparing tomorrow's teachers requires expertise, skill ... and listening.

“As faculty, we are really trying to listen to our students for what they need, what they’re passionate about,” says **Allison Pattee**, clinical assistant professor of instruction, and, for the past two years, the early childhood education program coordinator.

Many early childhood education majors like the pre-primary level of teaching, including preschool and kindergarten, she says. And school districts seek educators who can teach both general education and special education as they grapple with an ongoing shortage of special education teachers.

The College of Education faculty listened and responded. Since 2023, University of Northern Iowa has offered a unified early childhood education curriculum which meets requirements for Iowa endorsement #1001 for birth through third grade in inclusive settings.

This approach lays a foundation within the early childhood education major (Bachelor of Arts) that is particularly beneficial for the voluntary four-year-old

A SMOOTHER PATH FROM AAS TO BA

Allison Pattee and **Allison Barnes**, assistant professor, early childhood education, have been working with COE Director of Advising **Jenny Connolly**, her advising team and UNI Transfer Admissions to secure articulation agreements that create a smoother path toward a BA in early childhood education after completion of an AAS.

“This all started because Allison and I had a vision of building relationships with our partners in education, the community colleges around Iowa. The challenges were many, mainly because most of our early childhood students transfer in a technical degree (AAS) which doesn’t always play nice with our system,” Barnes says.

The effort has entailed exacting work between UNI and each community college to map out a course outline as students move through the community college which better positions them to complete their degree in two years plus student teaching.

As of June, agreements with Des Moines Area Community College, Hawkeye Community College and Kirkwood Community College were in place. The goal is to have agreements with all eight community colleges which offer the full AAS degree.



- **Streamlined articulation agreements with community colleges**, which should smooth the transition from an associate of applied science (AAS) degree to an early childhood bachelor of arts (BA) degree – whether online or on campus.

Both efforts increase access to this inclusive early childhood education degree at UNI. The online transfer program students began their first classes in May.

“I’m so excited that we’re able to give students those experiences through UNI and continue to grow and provide similar experiences between the on-campus and transfer online students,” Pattee says.

Field experiences reflect blended approach

Whether choosing on campus or online, students find field experiences reflect the unified curriculum. In addition to the standard coursework preparing them to teach in child care centers, preschools and in classrooms, today’s early childhood education majors learn the basics of home interventions, how to write individualized family service plans (IFSPs) and individualized education plans (IEPs), how to create goals and assessments and work with children, their families and Area Education Agency specialists.

In a key course known as “guidance” prior to student teaching, each pre-service student gains 40 additional hours hands-on in an inclusive preschool classroom setting.

“That’s something that we’re really proud of, that we feel is valuable,” says Pattee. The 40-hour experience is personally planned by the early childhood education faculty using contacts across the Cedar Valley region. “We have really tried to give students varied experiences, practicing some of the skills that we know they need to have to be successful as teachers—not just their teacher skills, but working with students in differentiating and planning and collecting data.”

Pattee and her colleagues look forward to working with additional preschool settings across Iowa to ensure placebound students have a similar “guidance” experience locally.

Collaboration among faculty in early childhood education and special education was key to making this shift successful.



preschools now in school districts across Iowa. “That’s really where the #1001 has grown interest. Before you may have been able to teach preschool, but not have been able to teach an inclusive classroom,” says Pattee. “That’s been the higher interest in terms of employers, to be able to have staff that are certified in essence for both.”

As the 2024-25 academic year begins, this inclusive approach will have immediate impact statewide with two additional program developments:

- A new **online transfer program for early childhood education**, approved by the Iowa Board of Regents in February 2024, provides placebound community college graduates the opportunity to earn this degree.

Special education's **Wu-Ying Hsieh** worked closely with the department to modify the curriculum toward an inclusive orientation and remains a key liaison. Others, like **Stephanie Schmitz** in school psychology, have joined in as well.

"We have back and forth conversations about what needs we're seeing and how we can help our students understand and be more comfortable with, for example, IEPs and goal writing," says Pattee. "We're looking at it from different lenses. We're able to offer unique understanding and expertise from our areas of study."

Pattee expects those conversations to flourish with the addition of **Dawn Mollenkopf**, who joined the college this fall as the Averyle Westphal Ehrle Professor of Early Childhood Education. Mollenkopf previously served as a professor with an emphasis on the early childhood inclusive endorsement at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Creating quality, appropriate classroom experiences

From establishing a unified curriculum to adding the online transfer program and creating a smoother pathway from an AAS to a BA in early childhood education, the faculty have sought solutions that bring benefits, remove barriers and ultimately result in quality education.

"The goal is to ensure confident, successful, well-trained teachers who understand student development, have the skills to support inclusive classrooms and can provide the appropriate classroom experiences for their students," Pattee says.

"Everyone on the early childhood team really feels strongly and passionately about the importance of play and the importance of developmentally appropriate experiences," she adds. "Our youngest students are having the opportunity to develop their social and emotional growth, their fine motor and gross motor skills as well as their academics and are having positive experiences in the inclusive classroom."

SPECIAL EDUCATION MINORS ADD TO THE TOOLBOX

Specific minors in special education provide a more in-depth base of knowledge and skills and, as a group, remain among the leading minors chosen for study by undergraduates at UNI.

While the inclusive early childhood education degree and its new online BA option provide a sound foundation, the early childhood special education minor goes even deeper into special education and working with students with special needs.

"Students recognize being a teacher is hard. We talk a lot about your tool box, and we are recognizing with the early childhood special education minor, we are just adding more tools," says Allison Pattee of the minor which leads to the #262 endorsement (PreK-K).

Within an inclusive, preschool classroom setting, the students in this minor work to meet the needs of students who are categorized as lower incidence disability, or higher needs. "Our pre-service teachers work with a child one-on-one and in small groups and large group settings while meeting the needs of their IEP and goal areas," she says. "They do receive additional training in various special education strategies and interventions, as well as assessments and data collection."

For elementary or secondary education majors, the special education instructional strategist minors prepare future teachers for working with students with mild to moderate special needs or intellectual disabilities.

New this fall, practicing teachers can now add to their skillset with online pathways to instructional strategist I and II, along with coursework that can lead to the K-12 behavioral disorders or learning disabilities endorsement in Iowa.

For more, go to: <https://online.uni.edu/sp-ed-endorsements>.



RESILIENCE REDEFINED

The high school class of 2020 faced unparalleled challenges as its final months were abruptly disrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the sudden shift to online learning and the cancellation of traditional graduation ceremonies, these resilient students adapted and persevered. Now, four years later, a remarkable group of these determined individuals is celebrating a new milestone: graduating from the University of Northern Iowa with degrees from the College of Education. Their journey is a testament to their unwavering spirit and commitment to overcoming adversity.



Bailey Leitner
Hometown: Dubuque, Iowa
Degree: Elementary education

Then COVID happened...

I distinctly remember my last class period in March that year. I was taking AP classes, and it was the last day before spring break. Many of my teachers that day gave us homework to complete over the break, but they also gave “just in case” homework.... A lot of people were making jokes about it because we never could have imagined what would happen in the weeks to come. My district later came out that we were done, and our senior year was completed.

Throughout high school I worked at Fareway. This continued through COVID. I thought that I might as well work since there was nothing else to do. This was a positive since I was able to save money for college.

Favorite experiences at UNI?

My favorite experience includes being a part of the residence life community. Especially when COVID was the major concern, it was nice to interact with the people who were living near me at the dorm’s activity hall’s events.

Another experience I really enjoyed was being a part of Cat Crew. We helped with Welcome Week events and helped freshmen find their way around campus and meet new people. This was a great experience for me because even though I missed out on a lot of those activities my freshman year, I was able to have a second chance and experience it, even if it was at the end of my time in college.

What’s next?

I have been substitute teaching back in my hometown. I have really enjoyed this, and it has taught me a lot about different classroom management and teaching styles. I am excited to implement those strategies in a classroom of my own.

What are you most proud of from the past four years?

Despite COVID hardships, I am most proud of my attitude and mental health. It would have been so easy to stay in my dorm room all day and isolate myself from the world. Instead, I pushed myself to be involved and surrounded myself with friends and things to do.

“Our students showed resilience! They demonstrated flexibility and perseverance adjusting to remote learning, navigating ways to stay connected to their peers, and growing their voice to advocate for their well-being and for those around them.”

Beth Harris, Student teaching coordinator and clinical assistant professor



Brooke Berns

Hometown: Decorah, Iowa
Degree: Early childhood education

Then COVID happened...

My experience having COVID disrupt my senior year was gut-wrenching. The most challenging part was knowing that my teachers and coaches were doing their best to support us but couldn't teach us as effectively without being in person. I could tell they were frustrated and discouraged, too. The best part of my COVID experience was spending extra time with my family. I will always treasure going on adventures with my brothers.

Why did you choose your major at UNI?

I chose early childhood education because of my love for children. Their joy and curiosity are infectious. I wanted to help guide their exploration of the world around them. I'm excited to teach preschool and special education at Hudson Community School District.

What are you most proud of from the past four years?

I am proud of my resilience and perseverance toward my degree these last four years. There were many times when I felt as though I didn't have clear answers, a sure path, or a defined community. My goal of being a teacher pushed me to continue even when it was tough.

“What I have noticed most over the past four years is the way that students have pulled together and supported each other in response to shared adversity. It's been really great to see the kindness, creativity, and resilience with which our students have navigated such a challenging college experience.”

Dana Atwood-Blaine, Associate professor of elementary education



Jaydon Gansen

Hometown: Belmond, Iowa
Degree: Recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership

Then COVID happened...

I was meant to direct a one-act play for my school, which was going to be super fun. But a week before our first rehearsal, the COVID lockdown started. As much as we tried to make it work, we ended up never having a rehearsal or performance. Online school was a bit of a joke, and that wasn't anybody's fault. It was just a terrible situation.

Favorite experiences at UNI?

Almost all my favorite experiences at UNI have come from the outdoor trips I participated in or led. UNI Outdoors is what got me interested in RTNL. Leading those trips with friends or even people I just met was such an incredible learning experience for me as a leader and person. Once the trips moved to the College of Education and became Outdoor Adventures, I tried to help build the program up so other students could come into it like I did and discover a love for the outdoors.

What's next?

I began a graduate assistantship with the College of Education's Outdoor Adventure Trips and will continue to help grow the program and encourage my fellow coordinators to become the best leaders they can be. Whether that's teaching hard skills like fire starting or even just supporting them in their personal lives, I want all our coordinators to become their best selves.

Your biggest takeaway from the past four years?

No matter what the circumstance, anything is possible with a good support system. Not only did my family support me, but I had great faculty to lean on during my time at UNI and incredible friends as well. Coming into RTNL, I knew nobody, but I graduated with a huge network of people I hope to keep in contact with for years to come.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Cage diving with great white sharks in Mexico. Digging up dinosaur fossils in Montana. Studying the rainforest in the Amazon.

Ben Olsen has seemingly done it all, and it's all in the name of garnering knowledge to share back with his students.

Olsen, a three-time UNI College of Education graduate, currently serves as the talented and gifted (TAG) teacher at Hansen Elementary and North Cedar Elementary in Cedar Falls, as well as the K-12 TAG department chair for the school district. He's passionate about hands-on learning and using real world experiences as vehicles to get his students interested in the curriculum.

"Kids are curious, so seeing how excited they get when I show them a picture of me out excavating a triceratops or in a rainforest and being able to share those opportunities with them is the best part of my job," he says.

Olsen has had numerous opportunities to learn a variety of topics firsthand, like when he spent a couple of summers in Montana working with paleontologists. Now, all of his third-grade students learn directly from that experience as he shares about the fossils he saw and the dinosaur bones he encountered. Olsen even had sediment sent in from Montana so that his students can sift through it with their own hands.

A few years ago, he went cage diving with great white sharks in Mexico and turned that experience into a measurement unit students get excited about.

Olsen traveled to the Amazon a year ago to participate in the Educator Academy in the Amazon. He attended again this summer, gathering more knowledge to bring back to his students.

"The idea is to get an authentic research experience so I can come back and work with my students and say, 'This is what a real scientist does, and this is how we're going to mimic those things,'" Olsen says.

He's had these experiences across the globe thanks to the support of fellowships and grants, like the NASA Iowa Space Grant Consortium funding he recently received to attend this summer's SPACE Conference at the Kennedy Space Center. He'll use that experience to further develop space exploration education to share with students in Iowa schools.

For the past several years, he's partnered with **Ron Rinehart**, currently head of Educational Psychology, Foundations and Leadership Studies at UNI, to create a Mission to Mars space exploration study. The idea is to mimic what NASA scientists do to prepare and execute a Rover mission to Mars.

Olsen and Rinehart created a curriculum which drew on ideas and resources



Ben Olsen

'00 BA, Elementary Education
'06 MAE, Curriculum and Instruction
'15 EdD

Rinehart gathered from visiting the Johnson Space Center in Houston, making it as authentic as possible. Olsen finds the Mission to Mars unit helps students develop critical thinking and decision-making skills under constraints.

Olsen's passion for hands-on learning – and traveling – stems back to his high school years. As a senior in Rockwell City, Iowa, he participated in a work-study program at his local elementary school. He was placed in a second grade and a fifth grade classroom, which "sealed the deal" on his decision to become a teacher.

On a visit to UNI, Olsen met with **Chris Edginton**, the former director of the School of Health, Physical Education and Leisure Services and founder of the Camp Adventure program, which sent students to help run day camps at American military bases. The opportunity to travel and teach these

children sold Olsen on attending UNI.

As an undergraduate, Olsen recalls "really good and real professors" who prepared him to teach. He researched alongside former curriculum and instruction professor **Greg Stefanich** and presented the work at a national conference. He also traveled each year through Camp Adventure, working at places like the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa and the Naval Station Rota in Spain, while also training other students from across the nation for Camp Adventure.

"The camp itself gave me the opportunity to work with kids, and on the training side, that gave me the idea of how to prepare for a lot of instruction and work with people of various ages and backgrounds," Olsen says. "All of those experiences helped prepare me to join the real world."

Today, Olsen aims to do just that for his own students.

FROM CURIOSITY TO DISCOVERY

One of **Brenda Kaufmann's** favorite memories from her decades-long teaching career is a recent one.

A few years ago, Kaufmann learned from **Beth VanMeeteren**, director of the Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education and professor of literacy education, about adapting her classroom environment to support integrating STEM and literacy. Kaufmann, a second grade teacher at North Tama County Community School District, and her colleagues were able to test the STEM materials themselves before introducing them to their students.

"I still remember the excitement as we imagined the possibilities ahead for our students," Kaufmann says. "I remember the first time my students unpacked a huge box of wooden blocks and created their first ramps during the Ramps & Pathways center. I can still see them learning to work together. I can see the sparkles in their eyes as they discovered how to create turns or jumps for their marbles."

For Kaufmann, who inherited a love of science from her mother and grew up playing with toys like blocks and tinker toys, this memory exemplifies her passion for STEM education. Her list of accomplishments in this area affirms how this passion shines through to her students.

Kaufmann was a finalist in the 2024 Iowa Teacher

of the Year recognition by the Iowa Department of Education and also the Iowa finalist for science education for the 2024 Presidential Award for Mathematics and Science Teaching. She's an experienced presenter at the local, state and national level about STEM in the classroom, a member of Iowa Leadership in Engineering Design and has authored three books integrating math and literacy.

This past April, Kaufmann was the featured guest at UNI's Elementary STEM Expo for Emerging Educators (PreK-6).

"The teacher panel was great," she says. "It was interesting to hear and answer questions university students had about not only my lesson, but the other educators' lessons as well. We can all learn from each

other, and I always enjoy meeting new people."

Since 2022, Kaufmann has served as an adjunct instructor during the fall semester at UNI, preparing pre-service educators for teaching elementary school science.

"Being able to bring experiences from my second grade classroom to share in my university classroom—sometimes the same day!—helps my university students really understand what I am teaching them about," she says. "I love being able to answer their questions not only about teaching science, but about other topics in teaching, too."

What Kaufmann enjoys most about working with students — both elementary and college students — is the chance to learn from them. But being able to share a love for STEM with them

— something she believes is especially important for young children because it gives them hands-on experiences and practice in communication and collaboration — is perhaps the best part.

"They engage in critical thinking. They learn how to agree or disagree respectfully with someone else's ideas. They learn perseverance and resilience as they test out ideas that may or may not work," she says. "Students answer their own questions and share what they discover with others. They use speaking, listening, writing and reading skills — and so much creativity — while learning and sharing about STEM."

Kaufmann adds, "STEM sparks curiosity, and they have so much fun."



Brenda Kaufmann
'21, MAE, Early Childhood Education

CLASS NOTES

Class Notes are compiled from information sent in by alumni and from news releases. If you would like to share your news, go to unialum.org/submit_class_notes or mail to UNI Alumni Association, 304 Commons, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0284.



Have you moved and need to update your mailing address? Send an email to alumni@uni.edu or call 319-273-2355 to update your information.

From August 20, 2023 to June 30, 2024

1950s

'56 Robert Lang, BA, Canton, GA, is 90 years old and has moved to a retirement village. He received his master's from George Williams College in Chicago, taught for 22 years, worked in marketing for 18 years and plans to live until he's 100!

1970s

'73 Laura (Noehl) Schmitz, BA, Ionia, received the 2023 Immaculate Conception Elementary School Hall of Fame Award. She taught third grade for 44 years.

1980s

'85 Susie (McIntee) Schwieger, MA, Waterloo, serves on the UNI Emeritus Association Advisory Council. She retired from UNI in 2021 after 32 years of service in Career Services and the Graduate College.

1990s

'93 Jennifer (Diller) Brown, BA, Ocala, FL, received the 2024 Golden Apple Teacher Award from Marion County Public Schools in Florida and is a finalist for their Teacher of the Year Award.

'93 Stephanie (Bell) Eckhardt, BA, Eldridge, was elected to the North Scott School Board 11/07/2023. She is a realtor with Ruhl & Ruhl Realtors in the Quad Cities.

'93 Aimee (Weld) Hospodarsky, BA, Monticello, is a K-5 school counselor consultant with Grant Wood AEA.

'97 Jennifer (Cameron) Paulsen, MA, Cedar Falls, was named the 2023 Iowa History Teacher of the Year. She is a 30-year veteran social studies teacher at Holmes Junior High School.

'99 Tiffany (Spates) Evans, BA, MA '14, Waterloo, received a 2024 Gold Star Outstanding Teacher award in Black Hawk County. She is a librarian at Irving Elementary.

2000s

'00 Kelli (Sitzmann) Zimmerman, BA, Waterloo, received a 2024 Gold Star Outstanding Teacher award in Black Hawk County. She is an English language arts teacher at Immaculate Conception School in Gilbertville.

'01 Andrea (Callies) Hottle, BA, Waterloo, received a 2024 Gold Star Outstanding Teacher award in Black Hawk County. She is a second grade teacher at Hudson Elementary.

'03 Jennifer (Meyer) Schlader, BA, Cedar Falls, received a 2024 Gold Star Outstanding Teacher award in Black Hawk County. She is a PreK teacher at Lowell Early Childhood Center in Waterloo.

'07 Chad Van Cleve, ASC, Cedar Falls, received a 2024 Gold Star Outstanding Teacher award in Black Hawk County. He is a social studies teacher at Cedar Falls High School.

'08 Dan Black, BM, MA '17, ASC '18, Council Bluffs, was named a finalist for the 2024 Iowa Teacher of the Year. He is a music teacher for Council Bluffs Community School District.

'09 Jed Batterson, MA, Cedar Falls, received a 2024 Gold Star Outstanding Teacher award in Black Hawk County. He is a fourth grade teacher at Aldrich Elementary.

2010s

'10 Alexa Hach, BA, MA '14, Grundy Center, was named one of the Cedar Valley's 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2023. She is a public health professional with the Iowa Department of Health & Human Services.

'13 Alicia Herzog, BA, Des Moines, is a master garden coordinator and received the staff 2024 Early Achievement Award from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University.

'13 Alicia Rogers, BA, Waterloo, was named one of Cedar Valley's 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2023. She is the director of training and development at Goodwill Industries of Northeast Iowa.

'14 Nicole Schroeder, BA, West Des Moines, was named a finalist for the 2024 Iowa Teacher of the Year. She is an elementary teacher with Saydel Community School District.

'15 Sarah (Turner) Helleso, BA, Waterloo, was named one of the Cedar Valley's 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2023. She is the director of Try Pie Bakery.

'15 Megann (Savereide) Tresemer, MA, Cedar Falls, received a 2024 Gold Star Outstanding Teacher award in Black Hawk County. She is an English teacher at Holmes Jr. High School.

'15 Daniel Vorwerk, BA, MA '17, North Liberty, was promoted to assistant director of events and stewardship with International Programs at the University of Iowa.

'17 Charles Mhoon, BA, MA '23, Evansdale, was named one of Cedar Valley's 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2023. He is an educational counselor with the UNI Center for Urban Education.

2020s

'21 Brenda (Elvik) Kaufmann, MA, Traer, was named a finalist for the 2024 Iowa Teacher of the Year. She is an elementary teacher with North Tama County Community School District.

'21 Hannah Luce, BA, Waterloo, was named one of Cedar Valley's 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2023. She is the executive director of the Waterloo Schools Foundation.

Since 1876, UNI has built colleges and programs and iconic spaces. We've sent Panthers out into the world to build schools, businesses and communities across Iowa and beyond.

Now it's time to ask ourselves:

What does the world need from us **tomorrow?**

Already, Panther Nation has risen to the challenge. Gifts are providing new opportunities for hands-on learning, creating scholarships for students and renewing the spaces that make UNI's campus home. Imagine what **Our Tomorrow** will bring.

Together, let's build the tomorrow UNI needs.



Learn more and make your gift
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Our Tomorrow
— THE CAMPAIGN FOR UNI



A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

Since we last connected via Premier, something wonderful happened.

Two and a half years early, the *Our Tomorrow: The Campaign for UNI* achieved an incredible milestone by surpassing the initial goal of \$250 million for a brighter tomorrow.

As we enter the final phase of the campaign, the UNI Foundation has set a stretch goal of \$300 million by 2026. From more support for student scholarships to launching our nursing program and creating a new home for Panther Wrestling, these additional initiatives are essential to building the UNI that tomorrow needs.

Many of you are among the more than 28,000 (and counting) alumni and friends who have said “yes” to *Our Tomorrow*. Here are just a few

examples of how your support continues to help the College of Education achieve beyond what we thought possible:

- Professional development for hundreds of students, faculty and practitioners of various backgrounds through multiple events, including our donor-funded Social and Emotional Learning Conference, Bill and Linda Tubbs Teaching Connections and Carlton-Mellichamp Lecture in Education.
- Participation in the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education’s Holmes Scholars Institute and support for UNI’s first two Holmes Scholars.
- Resources to recruit world-class candidates and expand our teaching and scholarship in areas like

literacy education, early childhood education and educational leadership.

As we continue to look forward through this campaign and beyond, Dean Colleen Mulholland and the college are intently focused on providing **more student teaching support, increasing endowed professorships, and leading the charge in rural education** – extensions of our campaign goals to increase student scholarships, enhance research and teaching, strengthen community partnerships and innovate in academic programming.

As I have traveled and met with so many of you this past year, your sincere commitment to the University of Northern Iowa always touches me. I love that our alumni reflect on their



Sunni Kegebein
Director of Development

sunni.kegebein@uni.edu
319-273-7319



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experiences, share their stories and wish to leave their legacy on campus. We are incredibly grateful and cannot thank you enough for all you do to support the College of Education students, faculty, staff and programs!

DONOR HONOR ROLL

Thank you to the following donors who made cash contributions to the college between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024. Names with (*) indicate Dean’s Inner Circle members, who gave \$1,000 or more to the Dean’s Fund for Excellence. Names in bold indicate UNI Legacy Society members who have named UNI in their estate plans.

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A WISH FULFILLED

New endowed professorship honors Corning native and alum

In 1950, a young woman named **Averyle Westphal** from Corning, Iowa, earned her bachelor's degree in early childhood education from the Iowa State Teachers College.

Upon graduation, she taught kindergarten, first in Cedar Rapids and then in Maryland where, after her marriage to Roy Ehrle, they had moved to the U.S. Army post where he was newly stationed.

Eventually they returned to Des Moines, Iowa, where she taught for a few more years before focusing on her home, family and community, as well as continuing her love of teaching through leading Sunday school at their church. Her husband finished his career as vice chairman of the Principal Financial Group. In 1996, as they enjoyed their early retirement years, they began looking forward and made a decision. They chose to create a charitable trust which would support the University of Northern Iowa and, in the long-term, fund an endowed professorship to supplement a faculty position in the College of Education.

For nearly 30 years, their initial donation of \$250,000 continued to grow. Now, both age 96, the Ehrles are witnessing the result of their generosity. In July, they met **Dawn Mollenkopf**, the newly named **Averyle Westphal Ehrle Distinguished Professor in Early Childhood Education**. She joined UNI in August after previously serving as a professor of early childhood education at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

"This is only the fourth endowed professorship for the College of Education," says Dean Colleen Mulholland. "A gift like this will be instrumental in our commitment to continue preparing

future and current teachers to provide a strong, foundational start to a child's education through robust early childhood education. The Ehrles' generosity and vision make this possible. We're thrilled and thankful."

The Ehrles' commitment demonstrates the value different options in giving can provide. "This shows how the gift of time as well as money can come together in a way that will have lasting impact," says Andrea Elliott, senior director of corporate relations, UNI Foundation.

As a student, Averyle read children's stories over the radio to a vast audience of children listening over the airwaves, thanks to the encouragement and support of a professor. She says simply: "I loved the children."

From those early connections to a choice made 28 years ago, Averyle Westphal Ehrle and Roy Ehrle will leave their imprint on the college and early childhood teacher preparation for years to come.



Donors Roy and Averyle Ehrle with endowed professor Dawn Mollenkopf.

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Annette and Todd Michaels
Miscellaneous Donors
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Catherine Smith
Mary and Larry Streiffeler
Genny Van Dorn
David and Marilyn Voorhis
Rebecca and Travis Wilson
Randall and Carol Winkey
Dale Wulf
Karen and David Zwanziger



JCCL:

THE UNI LITERACY INITIATIVE

Darcie Wirth's ('00, BA, elementary education) experience with the UNI Literacy Initiative, a professional learning experience offered through the Richard O. Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy (JCCL), reflects the heart of the program.

"The experience has literally changed my life, both professionally and

personally," says the school improvement facilitator and math consultant at Prairie Lakes AEA. "It allowed me to honor my authentic self in a safe space with people who are so supportive, gain the confidence I needed to find my teacher-voice, and lean into what I know is best for kids. It also opened me up to other ideas and ways of thinking."

Each summer, 16 teachers from across Iowa spend two weeks on UNI's campus to study elements of transformative comprehensive literacy and identify a research project to be carried out in their classroom during the school year, with ongoing support and guidance from JCCL staff. This research is then presented at a statewide "Share Fair" at the Iowa

Reading Conference in Ames.

Wirth was initially attracted to the Literacy Initiative because it was hosted at a place she knows and loves: UNI.

"I was also looking for an experience that would grow my leadership skills and give me some experience in literacy that would allow me to move my career in different directions," she



Darcie Wirth, left, and Nicole Robinson

something I had been missing for a very long time,” Wirth says. “I found myself beginning to flourish and to really like the person I was when I was in their presence. That showed me who I wanted to be in my daily life as well.”

After her experience with the Literacy Initiative, Wirth wanted more, so she signed up to be a coach for the initiative’s second cohort.

“I really enjoyed that year, where I spread my wings as someone who can help teachers, and I found out that I really like it,” she says.

Wirth started her first year at Prairie Lakes AEA around the same time, and the two experiences went hand-in-hand. Her time with the Literacy Initiative is what ultimately inspired her to pursue her EdD degree at

“The experience impacted the way I look at teaching and gave more choice to my students on how they might want to share their thinking.”

says. “I learned so much, made lifelong friends and colleagues, and grew in ways I never thought I would through a professional learning experience.”

On a personal level, Wirth feels the Literacy Initiative connected her with fellow educators in a way she never had experienced.

“I found friends and felt accepted, and that was

UNI this fall. This summer, Wirth was excited to serve as assistant coordinator for the third cohort of the initiative, where she helped “coach the coaches.”

One of these coaches is **Nicole Robinson** (’21, BA, elementary education), who currently teaches fifth grade at St. Edward’s Elementary School in Waterloo. She wanted to take part in the Literacy Initiative’s second

“I learned so much, made lifelong friends and colleagues, and grew in ways I never thought I would through a professional learning experience.”

cohort to “learn more about literacy and not only grow as a teacher, but also for my students.”

She accomplished just that.

“The experience impacted the way I look at teaching and gave more choice to my students on how they might want to share their thinking,” Robinson says. “I think the biggest impact it’s had on my students is giving them a voice with my classroom library. They can give suggestions of what books I should add and share book recommendations with other students.”

This is a shining example of the Literacy Initiative’s emphasis on comprehensive literacy at work — a teaching approach that focuses on the interconnectedness of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Robinson’s research project also highlights her takeaways of comprehensive literacy. She worked with one of her students to advocate for their own needs when it comes to the reading interventions Robinson put in place for them, communicating about what they think is working and what they’d like to try.

Now in its third year, the UNI Literacy Initiative is perhaps more important than ever.

“There’s a real concern that so many teachers are leaving the profession,” says **Lori**

Norton-Meier, director of the JCCL. “We’re trying to create something that reminds teachers why they do this work. It’s the innovation, it’s the reaching kids, it’s the love of the act of teaching and learning. We want to support them as learners and why they wanted to be teachers in the first place.”

The Literacy Initiative has also had the unintended benefit of creating strong teacher voices.

“When you have the opportunity to gather with 15 other teachers from across the state of Iowa and have intellectual conversations about the choices we make in the classroom and how you put your beliefs into action, it raises these leaders up and gives them confidence in a way we didn’t know would happen,” says Norton-Meier.

Ultimately, the initiative has impacts that extend far beyond classroom walls.

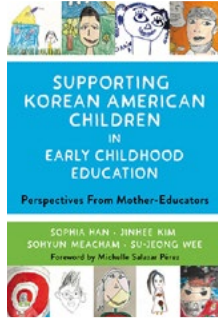
“The Literacy Initiative pushed me to think outside the box and to dream about what could be, rather than what is or can’t,” says Wirth. “This is a professional learning experience like no other. I can say, without a doubt, that my students have benefited from all that I have learned, the confidence I gained, and the joy I now bring to every conversation I have.”

MAKING THEIR MARK

College of Education faculty regularly add to the expertise and understanding of current and future students and educators through scholarly endeavors which include authoring and editing books, writing journal articles and book chapters. This issue of Premier highlights three recent publications and their authors.

Supporting Korean American Children in Early Childhood Education: Perspectives From Mother-Educators

By Sohyun Meacham (UNI) and Sophia Han, Jinhee Kim and Su-Jeong Wee



Book in brief:

Early childhood professionals can use this one-of-a-kind work to better serve Korean American and other Asian American children in the United States. Four transnational mother-educators share the lived experiences of Korean American children and their families through candid and vivid narratives that counter stereotypical and prejudicial beliefs about these communities. Topics include parenting beliefs and practices, naming practices, portrayals in children's picturebooks, translanguaging home practices and responses to microaggressions. The text raises awareness about various dynamics within the Korean American community for a more nuanced discourse. The authors bring a wealth of experiences as former early childhood educators, first-generation Korean American immigrants, current teacher educators working with pre- and in-service teachers, and researchers in different states, as well as mothers of second-generation children.

What prompted you to write this book? What needs does this address?

We wrote and published this book in response to our personal and collective experiences as Korean American mother-scholars, especially after the tragic Atlanta shooting in March 2021. We aim to shed light on oppressive environments, challenge the status quo and combat stereotypes and single narratives by sharing diverse stories, counteracting long-standing marginalization. By providing a platform for authentic experiences, we advocate for the recognition of Korean American children and families as competent American citizens. Our goal is to raise awareness among educators and the wider public, fostering inclusive and supportive educational practices. Additionally, we hope to inspire coalition-building with other minoritized groups to combat racial injustices collectively. Through this book, we aim to inform early childhood educators, offering resources and strategies for culturally sustaining practices and encouraging systemic change to better support Korean American and other Asian American communities.

Audience: Early childhood educators and professionals and teacher educators; researchers and scholars interested in multicultural education and social justice, parents and families, policy makers and educational equity advocates and students.

What do you hope readers of this book gain by reading/using?

I hope readers gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by Korean American children and families, including experiences of racism and microaggressions. I aim for readers to develop empathy and awareness, recognizing the diversity within Asian American communities and moving beyond stereotypes and single narratives. I hope educators and professionals in early childhood education will gain practical strategies and resources to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments. Ultimately, I want readers to feel empowered to advocate for social justice, equity and systemic change in their respective fields and communities.



Sohyun Meacham

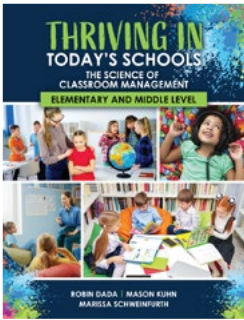
Associate Professor, Curriculum & Instruction



Published 2023 by Teachers College Press
bit.ly/MeachamPub2023

Thriving in Today’s Schools: The Science of Classroom Management Elementary and Middle Level

By Robin Dada, Mason Kuhn and Marissa Schweinfurth



Book in brief:

This book focuses on developing a classroom environment that is welcoming and inclusive to support relationships between teacher and student and between student and student. Teachers learn to build relationships with the child and family and all students with the support they need to self regulate and manage their success in school. The book

features a pyramid of strategies that are useful in large group settings and strategies designed for single students who need more support. Teachers learn to work with students who have experienced trauma and support their development towards thriving in school.

What prompted you and your colleagues to write this book? What needs does this address?

A lot of great books exist on classroom management, but most are encyclopedic in nature. The purpose behind this book is the desire to focus on life in the classroom and meeting the needs of all children who are a part of the classroom students teach.

Audience: Teachers and parents, as well as students preparing to be teachers.

What do you hope readers of this book gain by reading/using?

We hope that our developing and experienced teachers gain the perspective of an inclusive classroom that welcomes all children regardless of their culture, background, gender or past experience in schools. We hope that they understand that students do not act out to create chaos in classrooms, but because they have a need that has not yet been filled and that may need support of the teacher, specialists in the school and community and through a partnership with family and guardians.



Robin Dada
Department Head
Curriculum & Instruction,
Interim Department Head
Special Education



Mason Kuhn
Associate Professor
Curriculum & Instruction



Marissa Schweinfurth
Instructor
Jacobson Center for
Comprehensive Literacy



Published 2023 by Kendall Hunt
bit.ly/ThrivingInTodaysSchools

A Parents’ Guide to Grading and Reporting: Being Clear About What Matters

By Matt Townsley and Chad Lang



Book in brief:

Whether resulting from the educational fallout of the COVID-19 global pandemic or merely challenging the status quo, more schools are transitioning their grading practices away from traditional points and percentages and toward 21st century grading practices such as standards-based and proficiency-based grading. A Parents’ Guide to Grading and Reporting: Being Clear

About What Matters assists parents and guardians in understanding what is involved in 21st century grading and how to become better partners with educators in efforts to understand students’ strengths and areas for improvement.

What prompted you to write this book? What needs does this address?

In the last century, few elements of the K-12 school experience have changed less than the role of grading. Fast forward — partially related to COVID-19 disruptions — more schools recently have transitioned to grading practices such as standards-based grading (SBG) and standards-referenced grading (SRG). Through conversations with school leaders and parents across the country, we found out that parents do not often understand these changes in grading practices and how they may benefit their children. While a growing number of books have been published supporting educators in making these grading changes, no book has been written “specifically for parents” in the past 20 years.

We wrote this book to unpack the perils of traditional grading and tenets of standards-based/referenced grading practices to provide a more common understanding for parents and educators today.

Audience: Parents with children in K-12 schools who are experiencing grading practices such as SBG and SRG.

What do you hope readers of this book gain by reading/using?

We hope parents will feel empowered to have enhanced and more purposeful communication about their child’s learning both with their child and all school stakeholders. Moreover, we hope to improve the conversation for both parents and educators about prioritizing student learning over student earning. Understanding the purpose of SBG and SRG practices will reduce the likelihood of grades being bargained for as tokens of compliance, ultimately reducing any “us versus them” mentality.



Matt Townsley
Associate Professor, Educational Psychology,
Foundations and Leadership Studies



Published 2024 by Rowman & Littlefield
bit.ly/ParentsGuidetoGrading

NEWS & NOTES

ONLINE PROGRAMS CONTINUE TO INCREASE ACCESS, MEET NEEDS

Addressing student access as well as the needs of school districts, the College of Education continues to press forward in growth of its online programming.

- In April 2024, the college announced new online coursework options that provide **a flexible pathway toward endorsements as instructional strategists in special education**, including mild/moderate, intellectual disabilities and behavior disabilities/learning disorders classifications.
- In February 2024, the Board of Regents approved a new **fully online early childhood education program for transfer students**. The unified, blended curriculum prepares students for teacher licensure and an endorsement in inclusive early childhood education settings (Endorsement 1001). Placebound students in all 15 Iowa community colleges can now achieve their BA through UNI upon completion of their associate degree.

“This (early childhood online transfer) program now gives placebound learners flexibility so they, too, can gain the knowledge and skills to support all young learners, building upon their strengths and backgrounds to maximize each child’s potential as they learn and grow,” says **Robin Dada**, head, curriculum and instruction, and interim head, special education.

NEW COE LEADERS

Assuming new leadership roles for College of Education:



Sohyun (Soh) Meacham, named associate dean of graduate studies and research,

effective January 2, 2025. She previously served as interim associate dean of research, scholarship and faculty excellence and is an associate professor of literacy education.



Amanda (Mandie) Sanderman, assistant dean of assessment and clinical

experiences. Sanderman joined the COE in this newly-defined role after serving the Central Rivers Area Education Agency



Jim Stichter, interim department head, Department of Teaching. This 25-year faculty

member succeeded the late Curt Nielsen in January 2024.

Amy Nielsen, special education faculty member who served as the interim associate dean of graduate studies in 2023-24, has moved to her new role as associate provost for faculty.

NEW FACES BRING VARIED EXPERIENCE, FILL KEY ROLES

Among the new faces since November 2023 to the College of Education:



COLLEGE ANNOUNCES FIRST HOLMES SCHOLARS

University of Northern Iowa is now a Holmes Scholars institution, a designation reflecting a professional development program of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) which supports students from historically underrepresented communities enrolled in graduate programs.

The first two scholars named were:

- **Tiffiany Evans**, who is working on her dissertation in curriculum and instruction and currently serves as a teacher-librarian in the Waterloo Community Schools
- **Nimisha Joshi**, a second-year doctoral student in educational leadership who currently serves as adjunct faculty at the UCDS (University Child Development School) Graduate School of Education in Seattle.

As part of the program, the two attended the national AACTE conference in February and its premier advocacy conference, Washington Week, in June. Two scholars will be named yearly.

- **Dawn Mollenkopf**, Averyle Westphal Ehrle Professor of Early Childhood Education, a newly-endowed professorship. Mollenkopf previously served as professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.
 - **Sharon Dentlinger**, assistant professor of practice, superintendency, former superintendent at the Interstate 35 Community School District in Truro, Iowa.
 - **Tara Tedrow**, assistant professor of instruction, special education, previously with University of Iowa
 - **Katie Simpson**, clinical assistant professor, teaching, with the Central Rivers AEA previously.
- In addition, **Allison Pattee**, is now the coordinator, Online Transfer Program, and clinical assistant professor of elementary education. She previously coordinated early childhood education and directed the Child Development Center.

Key new instructional and staff roles include:

- **Hannah Jaros**, director, National Program for Playground Safety
- **Cheryl Meller**, graduate recruitment and event coordinator
- **Amber Dullard**, academic advisor
- **Anjali Myers**, Regents Alternative Pathway to Iowa Licensure (RAPIL) coordinator

11 FACULTY ADVANCE THROUGH PROMOTION AND TENURE

Earning promotions and/or tenure in the past year were:

- Full Professor: **Wu-Ying Hsieh**, Special Education
- Associate Professor with Tenure: **Matt Townsley** and **Eva Chen**, Educational Psychology, Foundations and Leadership Studies
- Associate Professor of Instruction: **Magdalena Galloway**, Curriculum and Instruction (C&I)
- Clinical Associate Professor: **Megan Balong**, **Shelly Bromwich**, **Carrie Elser**, **Leasha Henriksen**, **Ashley Jorgensen**, **Kim Miller**, Teaching
- Associate Professor of Instruction: **Denise Tallakson**, C&I

SUMMER FELLOWSHIP FUNDING BUILDS EXPERTISE

Eleven faculty were awarded up to \$4,000 in Dean's Summer Fellowship for summer 2024. They include: Curriculum and Instruction: **Joan Bessman Taylor**,

Robin Dada, **Sunah Chung**, **Karla Krueger**, **Sarah Vander Zanden**; Educational Psychology, Foundations and Leadership Studies: **Scott Ellison**, **Shelley Price-Williams**, **David Schmid**; C&I and Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy: **Lori Norton-Meier**; Special Education: **Sherry Petty** and **Amy Staples**.

INNOVATIVE IDEAS LEAD TO SUPPORT FOR CONTINUED RESEARCH

Two Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) faculty earned \$500 cash prizes and university support to move forward with their research for their innovative ideas as part of the Intellectual Property and Innovation Disclosure Competition II.



Beth Dykstra VanMeeteren, director of the Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental

Education, will further explore the idea that weight distribution and symmetry vary by the child. She is working on developing a set of learning tools and table-top prototypes for preschool through second grade for children to explore balance and symmetrical distribution of weight.



Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar's proposal involves an online system that allows users

to create their own narration of a story through custom-made characters, actions, emotions, scenes, dialogues, music, sound effects and plots. Partnering with the University of Chicago's Data

TRANSITIONS



Curt Nielsen, head, Department of Teaching, passed away in December 2023 after succumbing to cancer.

Nielsen served the University of Northern Iowa for more than 20 years. As an associate professor in the College of Education, he taught and provided field experience supervision in the Department of Teaching prior to being named interim head in January 2023. He earlier taught at the Malcolm Price Laboratory School where he headed the Department of Social Studies and held several administrative roles. He began his career in teaching as an elementary teacher and interim principal at Lincoln Elementary School in Cedar Falls.

Nielsen received four degrees from UNI – two bachelor's degrees ('86 and '89), MAE ('97) and EdD ('12). He was also a graduate of the lab school and its high school. He was granted posthumous emeritus faculty status by UNI in recognition of his career as a consummate educator and leader.

With support from memorial donations, the Nielsen family established the Dr. Curt Nielsen and Janet Nielsen Endowed Scholarship for pre-service teaching students.



Bob Brown, co-founding member and co-chair of the College of Education Dean's Advisory Council, died in April 2024. Brown, 93, had "retired" from the council in March 2024. In addition to his support of the college, he was well known in the Cedar Valley for his civic and business contributions.

Clinic, the outcome will be an AI-equipped demonstration of the emotional patterns of characters in award-winning multicultural fiction books.

FUNDING SUPPORTS STUDENT PROJECTS USING AVATARS & ANIMATION

Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar was also awarded \$5,000 from the Veridian Community Engagement Fellowship and the McElroy Youth

Leadership Fund for a project titled "Building Students' Capacity for Cultural Competence using Diverse Avatars."

She collaborated with teachers at the Waterloo Career Center (WCC) on the project. High school students from two WCC classes read a multicultural book and then retold the story using an animation production app. They showcased their efforts at the UNI Community Engagement Celebration Day in April 2024.

COE RESEARCH PAPER LEADS RECORD 5 MILLION GLOBAL DOWNLOADS FOR SCHOLARWORKS

One download at a time, scholarly works from COE faculty are equipping educators with valuable resources. A graduate research paper attributed to the College of Education and the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education, “The effects of blended learning on K-12th grade students,” written by **Laura Hesse**, (’17, MA) currently tops ScholarWorks individual references with over 68,000 total downloads. Of the record total, the COE accounts for 1.7 million downloads. For more, go to scholarworks.uni.edu.

NEW ‘DOT’ MUSICAL ACTIVITIES INCLUDE HONOR FOR LATE TEACHING ALUM SHAY

The College of Education, Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center and Richard O. Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy sponsored two full days centered around premiere showings of “Dot Dot Dot: A New Musical” which engaged more than 3,200 people in various events featuring creativity.

In addition to the musical, a highlight was recognition of the late **Terry Shay**, a former North Tama School District music teacher and UNI alumnus and founder of International Dot

Day. Peter H. Reynolds, author/illustrator who created the trilogy of books that are the basis of the musical, presented Shay’s family with a brass statue featuring “The Dot” created at the UNI Metal Casting & Foundry 4.0 Center.

FIRST STANDARDS-BASED GRADING CONFERENCE

More than 200 participants from school districts across Iowa attended the first Standards-Based Grading Conference in June, sponsored by the Institute for Educational Leadership. **Matt Townsley**, assistant professor, educational leadership, led with a keynote on: 4Ps Of Sustainable Grading Reform (Purpose, Principles, Pilot and Probe). The conference offered two tracks

focused on getting started and sustaining this approach to assessment.

AI SPOTLIGHT ATTRACTS INTEREST AT CARLTON-MELLICHAMP LECTURE

An estimated 100 faculty, students and professional colleagues attended the Carlton-Mellichamp Lecture in Education on February 29-March 1. From the keynote session to faculty and student dialogues, guest speaker Selin Akgün, PhD, raised both ethical and practical questions for all to consider in K-12 classroom settings.

Akgun presented “Fostering Artificial Intelligence (AI) Literacy in Education: Cultivating Critical

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONFERENCE CONTINUES TO BUILD

Nearly 600 attendees at the third **Social and Emotional Learning Conference** participated in keynote sessions and more than 20 breakout sessions in April.

Keynote speakers were: Mark Sander, senior clinical psychologist for Hennepin County, Minnesota, director of school mental health for Hennepin County and Minneapolis Public Schools, and co-director of the Midwest Center for School Mental Health; and Todd Parr, renowned author and illustrator of more than 60 books who is known for his inclusive storytelling.

“Mark has been navigating the complex partnerships needed to bring mental health systems and services to schools. I am excited to bring his expertise on trauma-informed schools to our audience,” said planning committee and faculty member **Nicole Skaar**, school psychology.

This conference is supported by a generous donation to the UNI Foundation from a longtime friend of the College of Education who wishes to remain anonymous.



Consciousness Towards Ethical AI” in her keynote address. She also led conversations with faculty on AI in teaching, learning and research, and, with students, on AI in PreK-12 classrooms.

Donations to the UNI Foundation from Suzanne Carlton Mellichamp ('63, BA) and Duncan Mellichamp support the event.

TUBBS TEACHING CONNECTIONS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

The return to campus of the 2023 **Bill and Linda Tubbs Teaching Connections** last November attracted nearly 225 attendees. Classrooms and the

Budke auditorium were filled with insightful discourse as participants focused on LGBTQ+ inclusivity in education from multiple perspectives.

Particularly well received were the keynote address on “The Power of Being Seen,” by Andy Hansen, lead teacher with Lou Henry Elementary in Waterloo, legislative updates and a session on dealing with challenges in books and materials, led by Johnnie Blunt, Rod Library, and Keenan Crow, One Iowa.

This annual event is supported by generous donations from Bill and Linda Tubbs ('69, BA) to the UNI Foundation.

AFRICAN AMERICAN READ-IN DRAWS 3,000

The 18th African American Read-In was a state-wide success, stretching virtually across Iowa in first grade classrooms from Mason City to Ottumwa, Dubuque to Sioux City, and, close to home, in Waterloo, Cedar Falls and Hudson. More than 3,000 participated, setting a new record.

University of Washington’s Michelle H. Martin, the Beverly Cleary Endowed Professor of Children and Youth Services, kicked off the hour-long program with music and movement, then read the book “Where’s Rodney?” by Carmen Bogan. Children’s book illustrator R. Gregory Christie led a draw-along.

Taraneh Matloob Haghnikar, associate professor, curriculum and instruction, coordinated the read-in, continuing the tradition begun by **Gloria Kirkland Holmes**, who died in 2022.

Through a Facebook private social media group, Matloob Haghnikar partnered with Johnnie Blunt, Rod Library, to engage interested in-service teachers, faculty and students in lesson planning featuring diverse readings.

“This year’s read-in aimed to inspire both educators and students to explore the world of African American literature and enjoy the wonders of reading,” says Matloob Haghnikar.

FOOTBALL PRE-GAME AT SEC DRAWS ALUMNI

A pre-game social at Schindler Education Center gave alumni educators the opportunity to tour the building renovated in 2017 and enjoy refreshments and other goodies as part of an **Elevating Educators Alumni Weekend** sponsored by UNI Athletics and the UNI Alumni Association. The tours were held prior to the North Dakota State football game in November.



ELEMENTARY STEM EXPO ENCOURAGES INTEGRATING STEM INTO ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

A “new and improved” pre-service STEM conference returned as the “Iowa Elementary STEM Expo for Emerging K-6 Educators” in April 2024.

This year’s focus was intentionally on elementary education where coordinator **Dana Atwood-Blaine**, associate professor and Jacobson Science Fellow, says both need and opportunity remain great. This event connected students with local teachers and STEM resource providers, with a special focus on the new elementary OpenSciEd curriculum and integration of STEM into the elementary classroom.

Brenda Kaufmann ('21, MAE), second grade teacher at North Tama County Community School District, was a featured presenter on a STEM panel and also led a “Live from the Classroom” observation via Zoom for participating students the Friday before the event.

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

OKOBOJI PRINCIPAL BRIAN DOWNING EARNS ED LEAD LEGACY AWARD



Brian Downing, principal, Okoboji High School, received the 2024 UNI Educational

Leadership Legacy Award in May.

This award goes to educational leadership graduates of the University of Northern Iowa principalship, superintendency or doctoral programs who demonstrate the core values of educational leadership as leaders of learning, service and/or change.

Downing earned his Master of Arts and advanced studies certificate in principalship in 2006 from UNI and a bachelor's degree from Iowa State University. Prior to joining Okoboji High in 2010, he served as secondary principal at Lisbon Community School District. He was named Iowa Secondary Principal of the Year in 2021 by the School Administrators of Iowa.

KAUFMANN RECEIVES NATIONAL AND STATE TEACHING RECOGNITION

Brenda Kaufmann ('21, MAE), a second grade science and math teacher in the North Tama Community School District in Traer, Iowa, was named the science teaching finalist by the Iowa Department of Education (DOE) for the 2024 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Kaufmann also serves as an adjunct instructor at the College of Education.

Kaufmann was also a finalist in the 2024 Iowa Teacher of the Year awards by the Iowa DOE.

Nicole Schroeder ('14, BA), a

Saydel Community School District elementary teacher, and **Daniel Black** ('18, '17 Principalship ASC/MAE; '08, BA), a Council Bluffs schools music teacher, were also among the six finalists.

GRADUATE & ONLINE PROGRAMMING LEADS TO U.S. NEWS RANKINGS

Ten College of Education master's degrees and the doctoral program were among UNI areas of study represented in the 2024 rankings for "Best Graduate Schools: Education" by U.S. News and World Report. Earlier, the magazine ranked UNI among the top 20% in 2024 for online master's in education programs for programs including early childhood education, elementary education, principalship and school library studies.

Many programs are offered in conjunction with the Division of Online Education and Individual Studies in the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education.

HISTORICAL BOOK GARNERS COMMUNITY HISTORY AWARD



The State Historical Society of Iowa Board of Trustees selected "Cedar Rock," a book co-authored by **Rodney Dieser**, professor, recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership, as the recipient of a 2024 Loren Horton Community History Award Certificate of Recognition for Outstanding Research or Publication.

This historical souvenir book is sold at Cedar Rock State Park



DISSERTATION EARNS MUHAMMAD HONOR FROM IOWA ACADEMY

Lamont Muhammad ('10, MAE; '22, EdD) was honored with the David Bills Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award from the Iowa Academy of Education in October 2023.

The award is presented annually to the author of an outstanding dissertation written by a student at an Iowa university that focuses on an issue of significant policy importance to education in Iowa. Through his dissertation, "The Writing Identity of a Hip Hop Lyricist and Educator: An Autoethnography," Muhammad examined the topic of writer's identity, noting that historically marginalized students may not see themselves as "school writers" and traditional curricula do not always take into consideration social and community backgrounds. He explored how his own identity as a hip hop lyricist influenced his writer's identity—personally, socially, culturally, and professionally.

Recipients receive a \$500 award. Muhammad is currently dean of culture at the Academy for Integrated Arts in Kansas City, Missouri.

near Independence, Iowa, and the UNESCO World Heritage Taliesin Preserve in Wisconsin and accepted into the Frank Lloyd Wright Collection at Columbia University. Book profits go to the nonprofit Friends of Cedar in support of the Wright-designed Walter Estate at Cedar Rock. A COE summer fellowship funded Dieser's work.

FACULTY AND STAFF HONORS

University of Northern Iowa

2023-24 Beverly Funk Barnes Educator Excellence Award:

Megan Balong, Teaching

2023-24 UNI Outstanding Teaching

Award: **Sunah Chung**, Curriculum and Instruction

Graduate College

Outstanding Graduate

Coordinators' Award to **Joan**

Bessman Taylor, C&I, and **Nicole Skaar**, EPFLS

Milestone Award for faculty who have chaired 10 or more graduate student culminating projects: **Julianne Gassman**, Health Recreation and Community Services (HRCS); and **Timothy Gilson**, **Kenneth Hayes**, **Kim Huckstadt**, **Roark Horn**, **Matt Townsley**, **Theophile Muhayimana**, Educational Psychology, Foundations and Leadership Studies (EPFLS)

College of Education Faculty Awards

- Teaching Award:
Theophile Muhayimana, EPFLS
- Scholarship Award:
David Hernandez-Saca, Special Education
- Service Award:
Laura Edwards, C&I
- Dean’s Diversity & Equity Award:
Kenneth Hayes, EPFLS

College of Education Staff Excellence Award

Alisa Weeks, Secretary III, Health, Recreation and Community Services

STUDENT HONORS

Graduate College Student Awards

Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award: First place to **Landon Wood**, for “OUT in Education: A Qualitative Study Examining the Intersectionality and the Lived OUT Experiences of PreK–12 LGBTQ+ Educators”; second place to **Jesus Lizarraga Estrada**, for “No Contaban Con Mi Resiliencia: Mental Health of Undocumented/DACAmented Undergraduate Latino Men in the 45 Era”; advised by **David Schmid**, Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs.

Outstanding Master’s Research Paper Award to **Payton Cannon**, **Paige Kayvan**, **Samantha Doyle**, **Traci Jolley**, MAE alumni, for “Communicating Emotions through Art and Conversation,” advised by **Sarah Montgomery**, previously with Curriculum and Instruction (C&I). The four also presented their findings on how to use art and communication as part of a trauma-sensitive approach to students at this year’s Social and Emotional Learning Conference.

Student Leadership Awards

Among those celebrated at the 2024 Student Leadership Awards

ceremony this year were these College of Education students:

- Drake Martin Gold Star Award, **Kylee Klimes**, elementary education; and **Emily Waldon**, elementary education.
- Beverly Funk Barnes Student Excellence Award, **Madelyn Stepanek**, elementary education and middle level education: dual major.
- Mental Health Ally Award, **Kayla Kellogg**, elementary education.
- Most Promising New Leader in a Student Organization Award, **Ashlyn Utech**, early childhood education.
- Servant Leadership Award, **Jenna Becker**, recreation, tourism, and nonprofit leadership; and **Allison Flansch**, elementary education and middle level education: dual major.

The newly formed Outdoor Education and Leadership Alliance received several nominations, including for outstanding new student organization and outstanding officer (**Alaina Wilson** and **Courtney Johnson**).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BRINGS ADDITIONAL REWARDS

Honored at this year’s Community Engagement Celebration Day in April were:

Marissa Schweinfurth, Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy, and **Denise Tallakson**, Curriculum and Instruction (C&I), recipients of the Veridian Community Engagement Fellowships.

Jenna Becker, recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership major, for her Thanksgiving food basket project;

Taraneh Matloob Haghnikar, C&I, for collaboration with students and staff at the Waterloo Career Center.



UNI ALUMS ‘SWEEP’ BLACK HAWK COUNTY GOLD STAR TEACHING RECOGNITION

It was a full sweep at the spring 2024 recognition ceremonies for Black Hawk County Gold Star teachers, as all 10 recipients for the 2024 honors are UNI alumni. Among those 10 were College of Education alumni:

- **Jed Batterson** (‘21, MAE), fourth grade, Aldrich Elementary
- **Tiffany Evans**, (‘99, BA, ‘14, MA), librarian, Irving Elementary
- **Timothy Hopper** (‘24, MAE), social studies, Central Middle School
- **Jennifer Schlader** (‘03,BA), Lowell Elementary Early Childhood Center
- **Megann Tresemer** (‘15, MA), English, Holmes Junior High
- **Chad Van Cleve** (‘07, ASC-Principalship), social studies, Cedar Falls High
- **Kelli Zimmerman** (‘00, BA), English/language arts, Immaculate Conception



CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER RE-ACCREDITED

The UNI Child Development Center has earned another five years of accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

NAEYC accreditation signifies the center is meeting national standards of quality to ensure the best learning experiences for young children and quality professional preparation for student educators. The CDC passed with an overall rating of 96%, with all three classrooms specifically earning scores of 100%.

The center, led by **Maria Ackerson**, has 10 lead teachers, 50 student staff and cares for 62 children of UNI faculty, staff and students. It also serves as a learning site for College of Education students.



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