

Text of Eldorado statement on 'Undercover student'

This is the statement read by Eldorado High School principal Robert Daugherty to the Albuquerque Board of Education Wednesday evening in response to the Tribune's "Undercover Student" series of last week. Daugherty said the statement was prepared in a five-hour meeting of the school's teachers and administrators Monday.

A school is really only a series of relationships based on trust. Fracturing that trust affects students, parents, teachers, the school district, and even the public image of the city. Tribune reporter Leslie Linthicum has threatened the fragile web of human relationships which is Eldorado High School. She brings to her series of articles not the objectivity of a journalist but a series of preconceptions about quality education. She has, in fact, preconceived notions of how teenagers construct for themselves, of how teachers should manage classrooms, and of how and what they should teach. Her notions collide with high-school realities; and she paints a negative portrait of "weighted" words, deliberate omissions, and unrelated events taken out of context. Her limited knowledge hampers her. She knows little not only of such mundane things as state and district graduation requirements but also of philosophical concepts grounded in basic research on curriculum, instruction, and strategies and stages of human development. In short, Ms. Linthicum has experienced education solely as a student. Unknowningly, she allows glimpses of a complex reality: of an educational system deliberately constructed within legal guidelines for a heterogeneous student body, of a society which permits diversity, of teachers who vary the educational fare presented to students and who couch discipline in human understanding.

The academic, athletic, and extracurricular achievements of Eldorado students are legion. This well-documented record belies the reporter's perception of an "undisciplined atmosphere"; these achievements are, in fact, the rewards of an orderly, disciplined, and purposeful educational environment.

High school is not a haven from reality. It is a reflection of reality. It is reality, a microcosm of society. It expresses community values as revealed in political decisions and mandates. It was mandated that Eldorado be a large school. As with all public decisions, this one has both advantages and drawbacks. The school has a wide range of courses to serve multiple interests and ability levels, a diverse staff, and a large and comprehensive extracurricular activities program. The disadvantages include a certain anonymity among both students and staff. The diversity offered is also a reflection of the change in population in public schools in the twentieth century from a college-

The Eldorado High School faculty has reacted to The Tribune's "Undercover Student" series with prepared statement read by Principal Robert Daugherty to the Albuquerque Board of Education and through Daugherty's appearance on a television program.

The transcripts of both are printed here. Daugherty also has agreed to an interview with The Tribune, and it will be published in the near future.

The principal said he found reporter Leslie Linthicum's stories accurate, but he questioned her qualifications to make judgments about the quality of education. He defended the teaching techniques reported in the articles.

Daugherty said he particularly regretted that names were used in the series, and he stated his belief that Eldorado is an excellent high school.

preparatory student body to a much more heterogeneous population with broader needs and interests. The public schools have moved from educating the elite to educating the majority.

Eldorado recognizes and encourages individuality and diversity among its students. Group identity is a basic need of mankind; it is a particularly strong need among teenagers. While the reporter recognizes that "like generations of high school students before them, Eldorado students are keenly concerned about their social status," she fails to recognize the positive connotations of this situation. The school has created a "home" for all kinds of students, allowing diverse social identifications to co-exist with relatively little friction. As in society at large, students identify themselves, as Ms. Linthicum notes, as "jocks" or "freaks" or other groupings she failed to detect. Most, however, prefer to be known as Eldorado students. By far the majority do not choose to identify themselves exclusively with one group. Social divisions at Eldorado are fluid, and students move easily among groups.

The articles' description of teenagers and drugs becomes a blanket condemnation of a generation. The reporter deals with stereotypes of mindless, pleasure-seeking students — who, unfortunately, have an impressive record of achievement in academic, athletic, and performing fields. In fact, some students use drugs, and many do not. Drugs are a source of real concern for schools and parents alike. Parents would like to think that drugs on campus can be prevented. They cannot. If drugs can be smuggled in large quantities into maximum-security prisons, it is not surprising that they can be brought onto high-school campuses. In fact, many of Ms. Linthicum's most inflammatory remarks deal with activities — rather than the campus — during nights and weekends. Drugs are not rampant at Eldorado. The drug situation is definitely improving. There are fewer hard drugs, but more alcohol

and beer, which are acquired from adults off-campus rather than from students at school. The school does a great deal to combat the availability and attraction of drugs. Distribution results in expulsion. Use results in three-day suspension and a parent conference. The school provides drug abuse education and information in practical arts classes so that students can make informed choices, but it cannot create moral fiber. Counseling and referral service are available for those who want them.

Campus aides perform a difficult function in monitoring student behavior outside the classroom. They deliberately avoid hostile confrontations where possible and maintain for the most part amiable relations with the students. The fact that they are not feared does not mean they are not respected.

Neither does confrontation in the classroom promote an atmosphere conducive to learning. A primary concern of every teacher is to foster the educational climate. While confrontation by a teacher may in some cases be the appropriate response, there are generally better ways than coercion to handle classroom discipline. Student behavior is a reflection of level of development. It may also mirror situations the student contends with outside the classroom. Better teachers are aware of student backgrounds and home environment which may emerge in classroom behavior. Punitive actions from a teacher may be completely inappropriate in response to student behavior which is an outgrowth of personal tragedy or overwhelming family tension. Teenage language may jar the adult ear. Words verboten to adults may have all the emotional impact to a teenager of *and, but, and the*. Ms. Linthicum's previous lack of daily contact with teenagers made her immune to the innuendo of the bragadocio and tongue-in-cheek manner of managing the classroom, a skillful teacher is sensitive not only to teenage peer pressure and standards but also to the individual needs of students. The teacher taps diverse human-

relations skills to create and maintain a purposeful, meaningful classroom environment.

Teachers are one of the only institutions in society which are not voluntary. An effective comprehensive high school must tailor programs for students varying widely in both ability and interest. Students and parents judge the curriculum by indicating their goals and objectives. Ms. Linthicum's bias emerges when she decries the absence of "traditional high-school fare." Eldorado's curriculum matches its heterogeneous student body. An effective comprehensive high school, Eldorado offers a strong academic program supplemented by performing arts, fine arts, and vocational offerings. While fifty percent of the students are enrolled in a highly academic college-preparatory program, all benefit from practical living courses. Programs aim not only at imparting a body of knowledge but also at developing intellectual skills, clarifying attitudes and values, and providing practical life skills. Student attitudes towards learning are shaped as much at home as at school. The record of off-campus achievement at Eldorado indicates that students, parents, and staff act on high expectations.

Eldorado teachers fail to fit Ms. Linthicum's preconceived notion of educator behavior. In a Channel 13 television interview, she comments that teachers let students "...find it for themselves instead of giving it to them." She unconsciously compliments staff members who know that the cannot "give it to them." Consonant with accepted educational strategies, teachers encourage students to think: to analyze critically, to synthesize, and to evaluate. Teachers deliberately vary teaching strategies, knowing the lecture method is shown to be the strategy least effective for retention. The reporter, steeped in the lecture method in her own educational experience, dismisses unfamiliar teaching techniques. Teachers tap community resources by making use of guest speakers. They not only lecture but use role-playing and personalized examples to make situations real to students. In a media-oriented society, they use films and filmstrips prepared by experts to supplement other classroom methods. The reporter is right: teachers minimize lecture. The "talking head" — even if it is alive — is seldom the best way to convey information.

The ringing words of the journalists' code of ethics fall on deaf ears

in the Tribune articles. The reporter not only fails to meet the goals of objectivity, accuracy and fairness, but also fails to address these fundamental issues. While the code of ethics finds "...no excuse for inaccuracies or lack of thoroughness," Ms. Linthicum made no attempt to depict a representative slice of student life. Moreover, she selects material for effect. Her desire to write a "good" story overwhelms her ethical responsibility for truth and objectivity.

Ms. Linthicum bases her perceptions on a woefully meager and unrepresentative sample. According to Ms. Linthicum, her "...assignment was something of a follow-up to The Tribune's 'Undercover Teacher' project of two years ago..." Tribune editors wanted her "...to find out if improvements had been made and to see how the education system looked from the perspective of a student." Nevertheless, she spent only fifty-five hours at the school of the nine hundred hours in a school year, in itself a questionable sample. Moreover, her schedule was not at all representative and was dictated by her stated need to complete state-established graduation requirements in a single semester. She brought a bias for college-preparatory classes but did not seek out more academically demanding classes nor avail herself of the information in the course offering booklet given her at registration. Having acquiesced to a program designed to meet minimum graduation requirements, she proceeded to judge the entire curriculum as insufficient. The fact that Ms. Linthicum came at the beginning of the semester and entered four one-semester classes meant that she saw teachers engaged in an inordinate amount of bookkeeping. The constraints imposed by her short enrollment contribute to the narrow scope of her evaluation. This narrow scope led to a kind of selective reporting that apparently reflects Ms. Linthicum's preconceived ideas about what a public high school should be — a curriculum restricted to the "3 R's," a classroom dominated by lectures, and a social environment centered around dating, perhaps much like the one she had experienced in the past. As a result, a comprehensive picture of Eldorado is lacking. Unfortunately, she needed a broad picture to fulfill her stated assignment.

Ms. Linthicum does not apply her writing expertise to the admittedly difficult task of capturing an objec-

tive reality in words. Subjectivity instead prevails. Her preconception of objectivity results in a selection of materials. Her need for color, drama, and effect, not the demand of reality, shape her choice of verbs and adjectives. She never supports her occasional gratuitous remarks ("In some classes, lively discussions ensued") with the examples which so amply magnify situations which she views as distasteful — restroom conversation, student attentiveness, or faculty dress. In fact, her refusal to discuss the countless positive aspects of the school and her desperate dramatization of the negative reveal that her articles would have been robbed of their sensational effect if they had presented a complete picture. Contradictions also emerge. Disconcertingly, she describes lectures by teachers she says excuse the lecture method. Headlines also vacillate (sic). The metro edition's "If You're into '3 R's' EHS Isn't for You" becomes "There's More to EHS than the '3 R's'" in the home edition. One wonders about what prompted such an enormous shift in editorial intent. What finally becomes effective in the articles is the narrative itself not the individual facts. Perhaps Marshall McLuhan said it best, "the medium is the message." And certainly Ms. Linthicum understands the medium. It is not clear that she understands the standard of objectivity. Altogether, the jaundiced eye of this reporter with editorial approval precluded any possibility of broad, objective reportage.

Eldorado welcomes an open exchange with its community. The school encourages dialogue including constructive criticism. In fact, the school numbers this characteristic among its considerable strengths with its achievement-oriented administration and staff, its well-designed instructional objectives, the high expectations of its students and staff, and its orderly, purposeful, and peaceful school climate. In a positive sense, the articles have caused students and staff to examine themselves critically. Unfortunately, personal attacks result in defensiveness and impede constructive dialogue and action. Perhaps Harry Truman said it best when he advised against arguments with persons who buy ink by the barrel. These persons who in reality have prostituted themselves for the cause of the so-called Fourth Estate in order to sell newspapers are best left completely ignored.