

op/ed

## Competency test results could reflect education, not race

Beginning this year, North Carolina's high school seniors must demonstrate their competency in basic math and reading if they are to receive high school diplomas.

It is a part of a growing trend toward competency examinations as a prerequisite for graduation. In North Carolina as in other states where the system has been adopted, it has sparked racial controversy.

As usual, the debate is sparked by the fact that black students as a group are scoring lower than white students. And as usual, some people are citing these disparate results as a proof of testing bias.

It is an interesting phenomenon. Let a black leader charge that the public school system in his state is providing a less adequate education for black children than for white, and the chorus of "amens" will be deafening.

But let a statewide test demonstrate that black children are learning less, and someone is sure to charge that the test is biased, perhaps deliberately biased to make the black kids look bad.

### Resolution passed

Just over a week ago, an association of black Baptist churches in Wake County, N.C., passed a resolution condemning the

states testing program as "racially inspired."

The Rev. W.B. Lewis, moderator of the Wake Baptist District Association and pastor of the First Cosmopolitan Baptist Church in Raleigh, said his association believes that the test is "designed to reduce the number of blacks entering the colleges of this state and country, and thereby consigning them to menial jobs."

### william raspberry

The trouble with that statement (the Rev. Lewis will forgive me) is that he doesn't believe it.

As he told me in a telephone interview, he does not believe the testing program is inspired by an anti-black sentiment on the part of state officials. He also said that he sees no basis for charging racial bias in the test itself. After all, the questions are based on reading and math skills that an eighth grade student ought to have.

According to the Rev. Lewis, his association's resolutions committee revised the original resolutions, making it stronger

than he is comfortable with. As moderator of the association, he decided he ought to go along with the official statement.

"My main problem with the test is that it was introduced too abruptly," he told me. "I feel that this abruptness is unfair. There was no remedial preparation for those (seniors) who, through no fault of their own, have been deprived of a good education."

State officials plan to administer the test to 7th, 9th and 11th graders, thus providing adequate notice as to which skills need to be sharpened before graduation.

### Concern for 12th grade

Lewis' concern is that there was no such notice for those students already in the 12th grade. He thinks it unfair that they should be stuck with a mere certificate of attendance which will probably be unacceptable for college entrance and for many employment opportunities as well.

"The (low) test scores reflect not only the limitations of the students but the limitations of the teachers as well," he said. For that reason, he said, there ought to be provisions for monitoring the entire educational process, and in particular for

monitoring what happens to students who fail the test initially.

As for seniors who fail the test, he believes they ought to have the option of going to school for an extra semester or two, at public expense.

That doesn't strike me as a bad idea, at least during the first few years of the testing program. After all, a school system that has promoted students all the way to 12th grade must share in the responsibility when it turns out they haven't learned the basic math and reading skills.

The most encouraging thing about the reaction, even of those who oppose the testing program, is that most of them see the poor test results as reflecting educational problems, not racial bias in testing.

Given that attitude, and a certain amount of vigilance on the part of black parents, there is a good chance that something will be done to improve the quality of instruction. To me, that makes more sense than smashing the battery tester just because the car won't start.

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## Burned out tacoholic tells why he lost his heart to Jalapenos

By Pete Mason

It all started innocently enough. I was living in California. I guess I fell in with the wrong crowd. It was they who introduced me to the stuff. You know how it is. Someone comes up and says, "C'mon, just try a little hit. It won't hurt."

"But, isn't it habit forming?"

"Naw, that's just a myth. I've been doing this stuff for years. I could quit any time."

### humor

That's how it begins. Out of curiosity you try the light stuff. Then you get to like it and you do it more and more until it just isn't enough and you go on to the heavier stuff. The next thing you know you're in way over your head and there's no turning back. You're hooked, addicted, there's a monkey on your back and your life goes straight down the tubes. There's nothing lonelier, more desperate than the life of a Mexican food junkie.

### That first taco

I remember my first taco as if it were yesterday. I was offered one by my new friend Rico. It was just a mild little job: cheese, onions, tomatoes, lettuce, a mild meat and no hot sauce.

"For beginners," Rico said, smiling. "Do it easy, like this."

"Oh, wow," I gushed. Life took on new meaning. Suddenly I felt all powerful. I was convinced I could write the great American novel, compose a masterful symphony, win the world's most beautiful women and touch my nose with my elbow. An incredible trip!

Needless to say, next time I tried the hot sauce. You can anticipate where it went from there. I went the whole route, from loaded burritos to double platters of nachos; from marathon-size bowls of chili to the final step, super hot jalapenos straight out of the bottle.

I wallowed in my degradation. Getting a mid-morning taco fix became the first order of every working day. If I missed it I got the shakes. No noon lunch was complete without a bowl of chili and a bag of Doritos. But the evenings were the times I really fed my habit. There were countless enchilada orgies, nights of tamale madness, awash in a sea of Coors or Dos Equis.

I just couldn't handle it. My friends drifted away. My work suffered. Time and time again I went to my job unshaven, unwashed, in the depths of the inevitable

daily downer.

My habit led me to perform degrading acts. More than once I cleared crowded rooms and elevators with my gastro-intestinal feats. Once I forced five people to abandon the Volkswagen we were sharing—in the middle of the Hollywood Freeway—at rush hour. Inevitably I was abandoned by all my friends, forever.

I lost my job. Days were spent panhandling at the corner of Hollywood and Vine; a dime here, a nickel there and then the frantic rush to the nearest Taco Bell to get straight for a few more hours.

### Heartburn was the clincher

Suddenly I could get no lower. And then the heartburn started. That was the clincher. It was the heartburn that made me look into the mirror one morning, to see myself as I really was. It was not a pretty sight.

"Taco fiend," I screamed at the image. "You disgust me!"

I realized there and then I needed professional help. I wrote to Julia Child and James Beard. I wrote to Betty Crocker. They all said the same thing. "Cold turkey is the only answer."

It was true. There was no other way. The next morning I ate a fried egg and drank a glass of milk. It nearly killed me but something deep inside me urged me to go on. At lunch I had a BLT. I came down hard. I locked myself in my bedroom and clung to the bedpost, weeping uncontrollably. For supper I had a can of tomato soup and a slice of white bread. I wished I was dead.

It was the longest 48 hours of my life, but I made it. I cleaned the poison out of my system. My heartburn was gone. I showered, shaved and went job hunting. I put my life in order.

It has been five years since I kicked the habit. I live from day to day. There's no pretending the urge is no longer there. It will always be there. There's no cure for tacoholism. It's admitting your habit and living with it which keeps you going.

Tacoholics Anonymous has helped tremendously. Knowing people who have gone through the same hell gives you the strength to go on.

But some days, usually around noon, I think to myself, "Just one won't hurt. Just one little taco with no onions or hot sauce isn't going to be your downfall. Just one combination meat and bean burrito with spicy sauce isn't going to make a difference."

Then I remember the Volkswagen and the panicked look on those people's faces as they ducked the 80 mph traffic to get to some fresh air and my resolve returns anew.

## THE ETSIMOBILE is coming to Lincoln!!!

Wednesday, September 20



The ETSImobile will give you a view of the future regarding our nation's energy transportation needs. Exciting exhibits explain the concept of coal slurry pipelines, and show you what ETSI's proposed pipeline system will mean to Nebraska.

Join us while we visit Lincoln. There will be favors for children and souvenirs for adults, along with informational literature to take home with you.

The ETSImobile will be open to the public from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on September 20 at the Cornhusker Hotel parking lot, 301 So. 13 in Lincoln.

You are cordially invited to come and see this interesting and unusual exhibit! It's free!

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