

# EDITORIAL & OPINION PAGE

AS I SEE IT

by Bruce Barron



### A WORD OR TWO ABOUT COMPETENCY TESTING

Sixteen percent of North Carolina's 11th graders failed the state's first competency test far fewer than had been expected, according to Governor Jim Hunt on his television program Tuesday night.

Ten percent of the state's 81,353 high school juniors flunked the reading section of the test and fifteen percent failed the math section.

All told, 13,312 students failed at least one part of the test, for a 16.4 percent overall failure rate. The tests were given in November of 1978.

"The results of the tests," Hunt said, "are not nearly as bad as some people had predicted. But they are not good enough."

Hunt said he would ask the general assembly to appropriate \$3.4 million immediately to help school systems pay for special remedial programs this spring for those who failed. The state has already distributed \$4.5 million to school systems for remedial work.

Results were about like many of us expected, Blacks and Indians and students from rural systems did the worst on the testing.

The results show that blacks and Indians did poorly in the test. For instance, state-wide twenty five percent of the Black Students failed the reading test as compared to a four percent failure rate among the white students. Blacks failed the math portion of the test at a 34% rate while white students had a seven percent failure rate. 79% of American Indians in reading and 72% in math passed state wide. It could have been worst.

A student who fails the test (either part) will receive help and at least three chances to pass it before the end of his senior year. A student must pass the test in order to receive a diploma.

### WHAT IT MEANS IN ROBESON COUNTY

It is difficult to compare the Robeson County Administrative School Unit by state standards because of the nuances and subtleties of life here but here are the totals anyway.

As you may know, there are six school systems in Robeson County. That is mind boggling, indeed!

Well, anyway, let me give you the totals before I say anything else:

### OUR INFAMOUS SIX Public School Systems

READING				
School Unit	Total Number of students who took the test	No. who failed	% who failed	Local Rank
Robeson County	829	192	23%	6
Fairmont	135	25	19%	4
Lumberton	320	31	10%	1
Maxton	105	21	20%	5
Red Springs	134	20	15%	3
St. Pauls	92	13	14%	2

  

MATHEMATICS				
School Unit	Total Number of students who took the test	No. who failed	% who failed	Local Rank
Robeson County	829	257	31%	6
Fairmont	135	34	25%	4
Lumberton	320	52	16%	1
Maxton	105	32	30%	5
Red Springs	134	23	17%	3
St. Pauls	92	22	24%	2

Statewide there are 145 school systems (six of them in Robeson County). The Robeson County School System finished 144th out of 145. That is where we rank. That's the first thing we ought to accept without flinching... especially we parents. But why?

### SOME GENERAL COMMENTS (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER) ABOUT THE MATTER

Initial reaction by administrators of the county system is to try and placate us with interpretative analysis complete with figures and percentages and percentiles etc. etc. But mostly the county administrators are reluctant to face up to our lamentable situation, even though most of it is not directly attributable to them.

Some folks say that Robeson County is a little crazy about race. In the early days it was dangerous to come to Pembroke during school days. You might get run over by a school bus. There were school buses going in every conceivable direction. One bus was taking the black students to Mt. Airy and other far away places; another bus took the white students to Philadelphia, Red Springs, Lumberton and other places. The Indians stayed home and attended the Pembroke Schools.

But at one time before the busses began to roll, Pembroke (considered the economic and spiritual center of the Indian community) supported three separate and distinct school systems, for their black and white and Indian students. In these days of civil rights legislation and enlightened folk, it is unbelievable to recall those crazy days when Robesonians worked out their racial prejudices in the school systems. They still do it but they are a little more subtle about it now.

As early as the early 1970s no Indians or blacks served on the

Robeson County Board of Education even though the school system is made up of approximately 80% minority enrollment (60% Indian and 20% Black). Harry West Locklear was the first Indian to serve on the Robeson County Board of Education. He was appointed by the white powers of that day. Locklear was, as far as we know, the first Indian to serve on the county board of education.

They (non-Indians) raised our children and taught them what to think and whose gods to worship. It explains in part why many of us today strive for middle class values, turning away from "our raisings" and trying to emulate WASP (white anglo saxon protestant) values.

Before the evil political scheme was ruled unconstitutional by the federal courts the late Senator Luther Britt said, in response to Indian parents who wished to end it, "...to eliminate county-wide voting (double voting) ... would tend to drive our races further apart educationally, politically, economically, and socially...." Senator Britt was proven wrong on every count before he succumbed to a heart attack last year.

Double voting was the system whereby voters within the five city school systems voted on their own school board elections and voted also on the make up of the Robeson County Board of Education (where most Indians and Blacks attend school). In other words they had a "double vote". In that way they were able to determine who served on the city school boards as well as who served on the county school board. The practice made it virtually impossible for an Indian or black to win a county wide election.

A concerned group of Indian parents took the matter to federal court and had the evil practice overturned. The federal courts found that double voting was unconstitutional to Indian parents.

Yes, all the above has something to do with our low ranking on the competency test.

We were administered by non Indians until double voting was broken. Therefore, this failure (and many others) can be laid at the door of B.E. Littlefield, Young Allen and other non Indian administrators who administered our affairs for so many years.

The present superintendent, Purnell Swett, an Indian, ought to be realistic and honest with us. He should call a press conference and say, "Here is the situation as it really is. Because of past racial and political schemes this is where we find ourselves today. Here is the problem... and here is how we are going to solve it." He ought not to spend a minute justifying Allen and past administrators who led us down this misguided educational path.

Before Swett assumed the office, Y.H. Allen (his predecessor) thought so little of the county system that he lived in the Lumberton administrative school unit district where his children went to school.

Swett is still surrounded by many of that "old crowd." For instance, David Whitfield (Swett's administrative assistant) lives in the Lumberton Administrative School District. If he has children in the Lumberton School System, his loyalties probably are with that system. I would not blame him for that. All of us who have children side with the better interests of our children. At least we ought to.

If the county system is not good enough for Whitfield and other administrators in the county system how can it be good enough for me and my children? And yours?

In times past county school administrators "administered" our schools and sent theirs to the city units or to private schools.

That has a little bit to do with our low scores. It's called Condescension, the past county school administration's calling card. They treated us with scorn.

That's why Swett should surround himself with people who share our dreams and hopes in the county school system. If they live in the system and send their children to the schools therein you'll see

a new attitude, a re-commitment to education. But not until then.

Too, the Indians themselves helped to create a monster (Pembroke State University) that now threatens to devour us.

Probably 85% of the professors and at least fifty percent of the administrators at Pembroke State University work in Pembroke and live in Lumberton where their children attend the Lumberton City Schools.

They add considerably to the quality of the educational offering at Lumberton, as well they should. But Pembroke State University is located within the confines of the county school system.

Pembroke State University (but begun as an educational facility for Indians only) was the beginning of education for the Indians of Robeson County. Until 1887 when now PSU was created by a legislative act, Indians in Robeson County were denied the right to an education. Our people grew up in ignorance.

Pembroke gave the Indians a chance. I shudder to think where we would be today if it were not for now Pembroke State University. It is a true saying: "teach a slave to read a book and he will refuse to be a slave."

Because of Pembroke State, Indians learned to read books. And things are changing. But it has taken time to break double voting, register people to vote, send Y.H. Allens packing etc. It takes a long time to undo a social injustice, sometimes generations even.

### SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS...

But many of us are committed to improving the quality of life for our children. Many of us now turn away from the red necks and racists in our midst. We do not follow them any longer. Many of us are committed to improving the quality of education in Robeson County.

But six school systems is not the answer. Racism is demeaning and threatening. Common sense must prevail.

A lot is at stake. Purnell Swett, the Indian superintendent of the county school system, can be a calming influence and keep the winds of racism from blowing too hard.

He must turn from the old ways, in effect, his teachers. He must devise new ways to solve old problems. He must not be afraid. And he should spend little time appeasing racists in Robeson County. He should expose them, not dicker with them.

Swett should admit the failures of the past; after all, he was not its architect.

And he should weed out the incompetents around him. They will destroy him and the efforts of progressive forces in the county. We want a bold leader, not a Machiavelian type like some of those in the past who kept everyone off balance with their political trickery.

And, most of all, the people of Robeson County (all six units) must let common sense prevail. We must improve the educational life of our children. We must admit that the city units left for racial reasons and that the county adherents let them stay away for racial reasons.

And the county commissioners must be willing to pay the price for good education. If need be, they must raise taxes without flinching. They must put up the monies and insist that the educators use the monies wisely and judiciously. They must speak out against the provincial ones who have kept us in the educational dark.

We should be alarmed but not panic about our relative low scores. The majority of our students perform fairly well under very trying circumstances.

And we should be forthright with the people: tell them where we stand and what we are going to do about it in order to improve the educational plight of our children.

# Letters to the Editor...

## A Note From Mrs. Nora Lee Hardin



Mrs. Nora Lee Hardin, a faithful reader of The Carolina Indian Voice, is shown above. She is 78 years of age and still walks ten miles to Lumberton to pay her bills and buy groceries. Mrs. Hardin, sent the following letter:

Dear Bruce: I will write to you. I have a picture here I want you to please put in The Carolina Indian Voice news paper.

I am 78 years of age. I am still walking 10 miles to Lumberton to pay bills and get groceries. I have moved 6 miles further from Lumberton, and live by myself.

I still love my Indian Voice newspaper. I don't get out to kill possums and snakes any more. ha. ha.

## "What Will Happen To 'Strike At The Wind!'"

Dear Bruce:

What will happen to "Strike at the Wind"? Heaven knows. This is a tremendous drama, I must admit, but it lacks leadership, especially from the main body, the board of directors. Where are these people? I must say I think that many of the members of the board of directors are opportunists.

The drama needs money. Why aren't the board of directors working to raise money in their respective communities? No, you never see one of them until there is a picture to be taken and then they are there.

When will there ever be an Indian as general manager? We Indians are the most talented people in the world, if given an opportunity. We have qualified Indian people who could do the job as general manager, yet every time we are bypassed. Regardless of whether the drama fails or not, we will be to blame. Frankly, it is our drama. I'd rather, if it failed, that we be the blame because we had an Indian general manager and not a White.

There is a lot of work to be done and the only way this is to be done is hard work and that's got to start. With the Board of Directors first, and the President, General Manager, Director and actors and they must be motivated by the organization. Is this being done?

I say if Mr. Thompson is going to be the General Manager then let him go to work now not next week pulling all his resources together to the main body - the directors go to work and stop setting on a stump watching the birds go by. I will say also that a hard core Indian he picked as Assist. General Manager to take Mr. Thompson's place whenever he leaves, because I am sure he will leave when he finds a greener pasture on the other side.

God knows I have really worked very, very, hard myself along with so many other people to make Strike At The Wind! a success. I wonder have the main officials worked hard. Let them ask themselves this question.

Carnell Locklear  
Albas  
"Boss Strong"

DR. ENGLISH

E. JONES' DAY

PLANNED

APRIL 20

"Dr. English E. Jones Day" will be celebrated in Pembroke today, April 20, in honor of the Pembroke State University chancellor who will retire June 30, 1979, after 17 years as chief administrator of the University.

A huge appreciation banquet is planned that evening at 7:30 p.m. in the Jones Physical Education Center in Chancellor Jones' honor. His "Day" will be proclaimed in the Town of Pembroke, and a special parade in his honor will be held through downtown Pembroke.

Dignitaries from all over the state are being invited to tribute to the man who has led Pembroke State University from its days as a small, struggling college to a proud University of more than 2,000 students—one that has its own graduate program.

Those wishing tickets for the event may contact the Office of Resource Development, Pembroke State University, Pembroke, N.C. 28372, or telephone the office at (919) 521-4214, Ext. 213.

## Pembroke Town Council Meets

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Odell Associates on consignment until the building is completed.

A proposed police manual was also tabled until the next meeting.

The town belatedly approved the town's audit after S. Preston Douglas and Associates, the accounting firm, made "certain changes as asked for by town administrators." Said Town Manager McDuffie Cummings, "The audit was in good shape. It was just that certain accounts were listed under the wrong headings."

The town also heard a monologue from Councilman Sam Dial relative to

annexation. Said Dial, "It is something we need to begin talking about and working toward. Quite a few people are in favor of it...I'd like for us to think in terms of 1/2 mile either way. Think about the tax base. Tax revenue increase, Powell Bill monies, etc. A lot of things to consider."

The council asked town manager McDuffie Cummings to prepare a feasibility study showing the pros and cons of such a move.

Said Dial, "We need to think about the future. Annexation needs to be done in an orderly manner..."

## Note Of Thanks

Dear Bruce:

I want to thank all concerned individuals and parents that made our Christmas program a success which was held December 20, 1978 at the Lumbee Longhouse Learning Center. I also want to thank

Jeff Maynor for the pig that he gave to us. We raised over \$500.00 for the center to buy things for our wonderful children who will be our leaders of tomorrow. Again I say thanks.

Carnell Locklear  
President

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