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How Should We Teach

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HOW SHOULD WE TEACH?

¶ Education reform is a top priority in America. Public opinion polls rank it as the country's most pressing issue, and debates rage over Bush administration initiatives on school vouchers and standardized testing. Public education and how to improve it are at center stage. ¶ But the cacophonous debate about public education can drown voices that have been speaking on education reform for decades. The political hue and cry about problems can cause us to overlook the crucial work now being done in schools across the country. Many of those voices belong to Colbians and much of that work is being done by Colby alumni and faculty. ¶ Over the winter, *Colby* spoke with and visited alumni on the front lines and in universities in an effort to frame the education reform issue and to show what is and isn't being done to educate children in our country. A fundamental question that emerged: What is the purpose of education? ¶ For Carl Glickman '68, head of the influential Program for School Im-



provement at the University of Georgia, education is key to the survival of our democracy. Glickman is dismayed that Americans increasingly see education as a tool for personal—not civic—gain. “Education is more and more being seen as a private commodity of ‘I go to school for what I learn and the kind of wealth I can acquire with the kind of job I have,’” he said. “The idea that it is a public purpose that connects me to the . . . improvement of life with others is something that has been glaringly missing in public education.” ¶ Are standardized tests the answer? Not according to Eleanor R. Duckworth '57, founder and acting director of the teacher education programs at Harvard. She argues that such tests are “uncharacteristic of anything else to do with living one's life,” that they do not assess or increase a child's knowledge, confidence or creativity. Rather, she says, the testing—and preparation for the testing—distracts students and teachers from more important ways of learning and teaching. ¶ That teaching is taking place, contrary to what you might hear. At Colby, a college with a historic

reputation for excellence in training teachers, the last decade saw the number of education minors double. “They're idealistic,” said Mark Tappan, associate professor of education and human development. “They're giving up other careers to make a change, make a difference in the world, and I think we promote that.” ¶ Legions of Colby alumni work on the front lines. We invited some to comment, and we've profiled what we hope is a representative selection. Online is a wide-ranging exploration of school reform featuring Duckworth and Glickman, two nationally renowned experts and advocates for education reform, and Colby education professors (www.colby.edu/colby.mag/issues/spr01/reform). In this print magazine, educators profiled range from beginners like Alex Quigley '99, an inspired kindergarten teacher in one of the nation's neediest schools (page 6), to dedicated professionals like Brittany Ray '93 (page 10), who returned to her hometown in Down East Maine to give back some of the inspiration she received. Some are leaders like Bob Furek '64, who helped get the entire Hartford school system back on track (page 14), and James Verrilli '83, who is bullish on the success of his charter school in Newark (page 18). Also presented here are the comments of a cross section of the hundreds of Colby alumni who are at work in our nation's schools and responded to a *Colby* poll. ¶ Undeniably, problems do face our schools, some of them of national magnitude. But gifted, intelligent people also are proposing solutions, working locally and globally to make a difference in children's lives and in the nation's welfare. Their stories are provocative, inspirational and sometimes controversial.