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—Contributor.....Jorda Daigneault
—Contributor email.....jordachapin@yahoo.com
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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Jorda — Thanks for your responses and for sharing your thoughts through the lens of such a difficult and heartbreaking reality for you and your kids. Here are the edits. All the best, Jeff

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 It's unfair to put the blame for racism on Leland & Gray

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Our society must work together — and not just blame
3 schools — and slowly change our culture by addressing racism

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 I AM IN A fighting mood. The recent articles reporting on
6 the settlement of a lawsuit that accused Leland & Gray Union
7 High and Middle School of condoning racism, harassment, and
8 hazing have got my ire up: Holding schools accountable for
9 societal issues is beyond the pale.

I am a mother of three African American sons, two of whom attended Leland & Gray Union Middle and High School. Both of them experienced racial slurs and discrimination by a few ignorant students there.

I *never* blamed the school for the behavior. Teachers at Leland & Gray addressed the racism when it was reported to them. I know the hate was learned at home or by peers.

And after hearing Leland & Gray is being held responsible for the racist behavior, I write to ask: When are we going to address the root cause of all this nonsense?

* * *

THE ILLS OF SOCIETY are front and center. The president of the United States has made it perfectly acceptable to utter disgusting venom and racial slurs, to attack those with disabilities, and to simply articulate hate toward fellow humans. He has no accountability.

People who previously harbored those racist, abhorrent thoughts generally kept them at bay until this imbecile started spewing his hateful rhetoric. Our country has turned back generations of progress on civil rights and equality since his first term.

For people to hold Leland & Gray responsible for lessons learned off campus is unfair and detrimental to the health and well-being of our school and greater community.

VTDigger's recent article, republished in *The Commons* [["Windham Central settles suits over student racial discrimination,"](#) News, Dec. 17], quoted Mary Gannon, an educational consultant and vice president of Windham County NAACP: "So, no, you didn't do the best you could, and that's been an issue at Leland & Gray for a very long time, as it is with other schools that we are talking with, some of which have cases in front of the Human Rights Commission."

I find this hyperbolic comment distasteful, bordering on slander, inflammatory, and extremely divisive. This isn't

44 leadership, and it is not helpful to addressing a ubiquitous issue
45 that permeates our whole society — not just Leland & Gray.

46 * * *

47 IN OUR CURRENT messy educational system, schools are
48 being asked to do so much more than educate our youth.

49 Teachers and staff are asked to change diapers and potty
50 train kindergarten and first graders (and sometimes older
51 students). They are asked to manage terrible behavior from some
52 students — behavior that includes racism, discrimination,
53 harassment, and hazing, behavior that interferes with other
54 students' ability to access their education.

55 They are asked to educate students on social and
56 emotional learning, to assist with personal hygiene, to feed and
57 clothe students, and to attempt to address a broad continuum of
58 learning needs in one classroom.

59 All this and more, on top of teaching academics, must be
60 overwhelming for teachers and students.

61 Moreover, staff must address harassment, hazing, and
62 bullying (HHB) reports, conduct behavioral threat assessments,
63 prevent students from vaping and substance use, and teach
64 children basic kindness, respect, and human decency.

65 Leland & Gray is not a silo — this occurs in most every
66 school in Vermont and the U.S., as described in "Breaking the
67 Cycle of Bad Behavior," an [article](#) that appeared in *NEAToday*,
68 Aug. 6, 2024.

69 Students do not learn to be a racist or discriminate at
70 school. They mostly learn it at home, watching some television
71 shows, social media, and other sources.

72 We, as a society, must *all* address these issues. We know
73 through research that changing culture is a slow, long-term
74 process, one that takes years to correct.

75 The problem has already been identified — now we
76 need to apply strategies to affect the change we seek.

77 * * *

SOME SOLUTIONS to ameliorate societal dysfunction are simple.

- We must hold anyone who regurgitates loathsome speech accountable. Call them out on their language. Simply state, “That language is not OK.” Report the individual to appropriate authorities.

- Instead of in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension, have the student responsible for the hostile behavior attend mandatory classes on racism and discrimination. Then have the student conduct a community presentation — including parents and family members — about what they learned about how their behavior affects the students they victimized by presenting to a group of people.

- Have the parties involved participate in social justice. The NAACP, along with other entities, could team up and hold community meetings and activities to build community rather than divide it in order to help combat the learned behavior.

- Research shows how cell phones negatively affect children and that some children become addicted to using these devices. Cyberbullying, name calling, and other distasteful discourse takes place among peers using electronic devices.

To protect students, Leland & Gray instituted no cell phones or electronic devices (except for Chromebooks used for academics) from bell to bell. This policy could go further if parents or guardians limit or prohibit their children from using these devices until they are mature and have learned how to use them properly.

- Substance use, caffeine, and vaping all contribute to anxiety and behavior issues, and they negatively affect brain development and learning among, other effects. Parents and guardians should not purchase any of these substances for children.

- Simply modeling the behavior of being open-minded, non-racist, kind, and accepting of others’ differences is a big step toward changing societal culture.

113 * * *

114 THEN, OF COURSE, there are more-complex issues that
115 have greater, more-difficult solutions that are being worked on at
116 the local, regional, state, and federal levels: homelessness,
117 substance abuse, hunger, poverty, mental health crises, and
118 access to health care, just to name a few.

119 Some parents or guardians are not able to meet the
120 needs of their children, so the school steps up to the plate to
121 assist the student in accessing their education.

122 Leland & Gray supports students in need by providing
123 clothing, hygiene supplies, food throughout the year, mental
124 health support, substance abuse counseling, gas cards, and
125 transportation to and from school.

126 Resources are limited, but Leland & Gray does the best it
127 can to help students.

128 * * *

129 I AM PASSIONATE about this issue because I have lived
130 with racism and discrimination through my boys for almost 35
131 years. I detest it and want this nonsense to stop.

132 But Leland & Gray is being held responsible for the
133 racism and discrimination in its halls today, even though Martin
134 Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Malcolm X, Sojourner Truth,
135 Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Rosa Parks and others who
136 advanced civil rights couldn't eradicate racism and
137 discrimination in our country.

138 This issue is so much deeper than blaming any school for
139 lessons kids learned at home. This is gaslighting at its worst. And
140 what is the agenda of the media in focusing on Leland & Gray,
141 when this issue is omnipresent throughout society?

142 We can all do better, and I hope everyone will call
143 anyone out on racist and discriminatory language and behavior.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

144 **JORDA DAIGNEAULT** is a longtime nurse practitioner in
145 the area and has worked as the school nurse at Leland & Gray for
146 the past 5½ years. She submits this piece in her personal
147 capacity, not representing her employer. “I am writing this
148 viewpoint as a mom who watched my children navigate the
149 complexities of racism and discrimination throughout their lives,
150 and the racism and discrimination continues to this day,” she
151 says.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

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####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

153

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

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####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

155

####END LOGLINE####