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[REDACTED]

**Notes from editor (not for publication):**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 heartbreak reality for you and your kids. Here are the edits. All the best, Jeff

[REDACTED]

**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.

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

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

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

20 \* \* \*

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

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

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

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

42 I find this hyperbolic comment distasteful, bordering on  
43 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 \* \* \*

78                   SOME SOLUTIONS to ameliorate societal dysfunction are  
79                   simple.

80                   • We must hold anyone who regurgitates loathsome  
81                   speech accountable. Call them out on their language. Simply  
82                   state, "That language is not OK." Report the individual to  
83                   appropriate authorities.

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

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

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

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

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

110                  • Simply modeling the behavior of being open-minded,  
111                  non-racist, kind, and accepting of others' differences is a big step  
112                  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:*

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LINKS:

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153

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VIDEO:

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#####END VIDEO#####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

#####BEGIN LOGLINE#####

155

#####END LOGLINE#####