

Newsday

'Creating an underclass of young people'

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Photo credit: Howard Schnapp | Students from South Bay Elementary School arrive for their first day in February 2010 at Our Lady of Grace Church in West Babylon. Their school building burned down the week before.

Elaine Gross's op-ed on the institutional racism leading to educational disparities identified the "elephant in the living room" -- segregation leading to different, lifelong trajectories for African-Americans, Latinos and American Indians [["Separate, unequal," June 5](#)].

Opportunities for advancement without the basis of a solid education are very limited. Our juvenile justice system and prisons are no place for our residents. The statistics indicated that we are creating an underclass of young people with little hope of advancement from generation to generation.

Gross's suggestions for policy change need to be evaluated with consideration and compassion by our legislators.

Catherine Carballeira, [Port Jefferson Station](#)

Editor's note: The writer is a past president of the National Association of Puerto Rican and Hispanic Social Workers.

While Elaine Gross explains the relationship between race, segregated communities and [Long Island's](#) high school graduation rates, further analysis reveals that poverty is a significant factor. Research I conducted for 110 New York State high schools indicates an overpowering correlation between poverty and high school graduation rates, with race having little correlation.

Consider that nationally 10 percent of whites and 33 percent of blacks live in poverty, which limits mobility and ultimately factors into where people live. It is true that racism influences how folks are welcomed into communities, but the ability of people to afford living in wealthier communities is insurmountable for a person in poverty. Poverty perpetuates segregated communities.

Children have to overcome the influences of poverty where housing patterns leave them concentrated in low-performing schools, which have high teacher turnover rates, higher student-teacher ratios and inconsistent instruction. Further inhibiting academic achievement of children living in poverty is that their parents are too poor to provide the resources necessary for extra help and tutoring.

While race plays a role, addressing the educational needs of children in poverty is the fundamental issue.

Martin R. Cantor, [Melville](#)

Editor's note: The writer is the author of "Long Island, The Global Economy and Race: The Aging of America's First Suburb."