**1. Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to more issues and concerns for all students and their families, but this is**[**especially true**](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/06/remote-learning-shift-leaves-students-disabilities-behind)**for students with disabilities. Additionally, the gap in graduation and drop-out rates between students with and without disabilities continues to undermine their futures. For example, in**[**the class of 2018**](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp)**, only 66 percent of Black students with disabilities, 71 percent of Hispanic students with disabilities, 77 percent of white students with disabilities, and 79 percent of Asian-American students with disabilities completed high school. Furthermore,**[**just seven percent of students born with a disability**](https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Lack%20of%20Equal%20Pay%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities_Dec%2014.pdf)**graduate from college. What is your plan for ensuring that all students with disabilities receive a quality and appropriate education to acquire the critical and marketable skills necessary to compete in a job-driven economy?**

The quality of our children’s education shouldn’t depend on where they grow up, their race, their wealth, or a disability, and I believe that public education—and the investments we make in our children through schools—should be an engine of opportunity for all North Carolinians. We must invest in opportunity through our schools by fully funding Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to provide schools the resources they need to succeed. I also support investment in specialized instructional support personnel, including counselors, psychologists, and other professionals, who address children’s unique academic and developmental needs and help ensure every child can thrive in school.

**2. In the economic expansion prior to the COVID-19 pandemic,**[**the national employment rate**](https://disabilitycompendium.org/sites/default/files/iod/reports/2019-annual-disability-statistics-supplement-pdfs/2019_Annual_Disability_Statistics_Supplement_ALL.pdf?ts=1580831674)**for working-age people with disabilities in America was 37.6 percent compared to 77.8 percent of people without disabilities. Further, there continues to be significant disparities in employment outcomes within the disability community, which varies**[**from state to state**](https://www.respectability.org/2020/02/best-states-2020/)**. There are significant racial disparities in disability employment outcomes. 38.9 percent of working-age white people with disabilities have jobs compared to**[**only 29.7 percent**](https://disabilitycompendium.org/sites/default/files/iod/reports/2019-annual-disability-statistics-compendium-pdfs/2019_Annual_Disability_Statistics_Compendium_ALL.pdf?ts=1580831674)**of working-age Black people with disabilities had jobs, 39.4 percent of working-age Hispanics with disabilities and 43.2 percent of working-age Asian-Americans with disabilities. The pandemic has ravaged the disability community and**[**more than 1 million**](https://kesslerfoundation.org/press-release/ntide-april-2020-jobs-report-covid-recession-hits-workers-disabilities-harder)**workers with disabilities have lost their jobs. If elected, what will you do to ensure that the government is removing barriers and promoting high quality, inclusive services built on evidence-based policies, practices and procedures leading to competitive, meaningful careers, which includes promoting entrepreneurial opportunities?**

Creating economic opportunities for all North Carolinians, including North Carolinians with disabilities, starts with federal policies that champion workers, not those that further concentrate wealth and economic opportunities in the hands of a few. That means enacting policies that create more jobs here in America and ensuring those jobs pay a living wage, include good benefits like health care coverage, enforce worker protections that promote the health and safety of workers and remove barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. It’s also far past time that we address economic inequality due to institutionalized racial discrimination and the resulting disparities in inter-generational wealth. We need innovative policies that break down historical barriers and encourage capital investment in communities of color and minority-owned businesses to reverse the legacy of economic injustice. Together, we can work to create more economic opportunities for North Carolinians with disabilities and ensure those opportunities lead to safe, secure and meaningful employment.

**3. The disability community fundamentally believes in the need to ensure “Nothing about us, without us” – real inclusion and places at decision making tables – because we know solutions that work and want to be a part of making our communities stronger. What specific measures have you taken to make your campaign accessible for, and inclusive of, people with disabilities, as every issue impacts our lives?**

Throughout my campaign, I’ve prioritized hearing from North Carolinians – in person before the pandemic and now virtually – to discuss the issues facing communities in our state and potential solutions. We want to continue to engage with disability communities in North Carolina and welcome North Carolinians with disabilities to join these conversations,and provide feedback on the issues they’re passionate about as we work together to find potential solutions. More broadly, we’ve worked to make sure our campaign is as accessible as possible by taking steps, like adding captions to all of our videos, so that all North Carolinians can get involved with our campaign and help us fight for better representation for individuals with disabilities in the Senate.

**RespectAbility published**[***Disability in Philanthropy & Nonprofits***](https://www.respectability.org/2019/04/new-study-philanthropists-and-nonprofits-exclude-people-with-disabilities/#:~:text=48%25-,%E2%80%9CDisability%20in%20Philanthropy%20%26%20Nonprofits%3A%20A%20Study%20on%20the%20Inclusion,foundations%20can%20take%20to%20improve.)**, based on our study on the levels of disability inclusion in the social sector across the country. This largescale study found significant data showing that nationwide, organizations overall want to be inclusive, but are unintentionally excluding the one-in-five people with disabilities. What will you do to promote policies and practices designed to support full community engagement, access and inclusion of people with disabilities?**

Exclusion and barriers to opportunity for individuals with disabilities hold our country back from reaching its full potential. It’s critical that our businesses and organizations as well as federal, state and local policies are as inclusive as possible. We must push to do better, and proactively and regularly review policies and practices that may be unintentionally exclusionary or harmful and then work to improve them. That starts by engaging with the disability community and including individuals with disabilities in the decision-making process. That’s what I plan to do as Senator.

**5. Elected officials have multiple opportunities to demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, full community participation and celebrating the contributions and accomplishments of people with disabilities through press releases, speeches, celebratory events including**[**National Disability Employment Awareness Month**](https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/)**. There are significant stigmas that create attitudinal barriers that limit options and perpetuates low expectations for people with disabilities. What measures will you take to combat these stigmas and promote opportunities for people with disabilities?**

As Senator, my job is going to be to represent all North Carolinians and be their voice in Congress. I will fight for the interests of the disability community in the Senate through legislation and federal policy, but also by lifting up the stories of North Carolinians with disabilities and fighting and speaking out publicly against harmful stereotypes or stigmas that create barriers or challenges for the disability community.

**6. In**[**our nation’s public schools**](https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html)**, there are 6.3 million students with disabilities. The changing demographics of America are reflected in these students, with 11.4 percent of students with disabilities nationwide, almost 720,000, also identified as**[**English-language learners**](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp)**. Their accommodation needs are compounded by the fact that many come from households that do not speak English at home, adding an extra challenge for parental interaction. It can also be harder to diagnose disabilities in children when they are English language learners. Additionally, immigration issues and fears over**[**the public charge**](https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/12/politics/public-charge-explained/index.html)**rule impact students with disabilities, their families and the wider workforce. What policies would you advance to enable students and their families who are English language learners with disabilities to succeed in school and employment?**

It’s critical that every student has the same opportunities for academic success. I support increased investment in our public schools so that every student has the resources they need to succeed as well as investments in support personnel, including counselors, psychologists, and other professionals, who address children’s unique academic and developmental needs and help ensure every child can thrive in school.

**7. Housing, criminal justice, climate issues, transportation and every other area have significant impacts on people with disabilities. What additional policies and priorities, other than those already discussed above, do you plan to focus on to improve the lives of people with disabilities?**

North Carolinians deserve a Senator that fights for the interests of their constituents, not their own political interests. We can no longer afford the partisan games we’ve seen from our state’s current representation in Washington when it comes to fundamental issues like health care and earned benefits like Social Security, Medicare and SSDI. As North Carolina’s Senator, I would fight to make health care both accessible and affordable for all of my constituents, which is especially important in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. We must also protect critical earned benefits like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and SSDI. These benefits provide critical lifelines for North Carolinians across the state and shouldn’t be put at risk to score political points. As North Carolina’s Senator, I will always put the needs of my constituents and North Carolina communities first.