**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 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, 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 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?**

Education is a fundamental keystone to economic opportunity for all Vermonters. Schools are the heart of our communities. To give our children their best futures, we must focus on education from pre-k through higher education. We need educational opportunities for all Vermonters seeking more education, including trade schools, internships, and mentoring, that meet them where they are and help them realize their full potential as members of our communities.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed many of the underlying inadequacies in our education system that many of us have known about, many have experienced, and so many Vermonters, stakeholders and organizations have tried to rectify for years.

We must also meet students where they are and adjust our system to meet our current reality. We must expand broadband to ensure that the students who can and will be studying from home can do so. We must also support our teachers, support staff and schools as they provide education for students who are not able to study and learn from home.

We must expand our understanding of societal issues that inhibit learning and overextend teachers. By closely connecting the Department of Health and the Agency of Human Services with the Agency of Education and working with frontline state, local and designated agency employees, we can find ways to save money by reducing redundancy, provide a stronger continuum of care and improve outcomes for some of our most vulnerable Vermonters.

**2. In the economic expansion prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the national employment rate 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. 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 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 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?**

Many people with disabilities face discrimination and barriers that restrict them from participating in society on an equal basis. We must prioritize legislation that incorporates equity and funds inclusive services. We must provide incentives and support to Vermont businesses to hire people with disabilities and ensure that schools are providing education that meets each child’s needs. We must expand public transportation options so those who are disabled do not become isolated.

As Governor, I will improve broadband access to our smaller towns and communities across the state. This will allow our disabled Vermonters, creative citizens and entrepreneurs, the opportunity to work where they live. So many disabled folks had been artificially restricted from career opportunities based on the false notion that it would have impossible to do that work in a different setting. The coronavirus pandemic has taught us otherwise.  Broadband will drastically improve career options for disabled Vermonters across the state who wish to work from home.

**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?**

I have always built my career in public service around listening, elevating, and including diverse voices. Our campaign is advised by a diverse group of individuals from across the state including both a staff member with a disability and key advisors who both have disabilities themselves and who have been working with the disability community and special education for years. Their voices are included and considered when making many of the key decisions on our campaign.

Accessibility during this campaign has been affected both positively and negatively by the coronavirus crisis. Many of our events that would have otherwise happened in-person have now led to more accessibility for those who would have had difficulties accessing them previously.

Specifically looking at steps our campaign has taken, we have diversified our modes of communicating with folks across the state to ensure that touchpoints exist for communities who may not have access to traditional modes of communicating with campaigns. These include hosting telephone town halls, subtitled videos, roundtable events on social media, and a drive-in campaign event with specific access and communication for folks who wished to attend who had disabilities. We have also highlighted key issues for the disabled community in our email program. Below is one of the emails that we sent out earlier this month:

***Today marks the 30th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We have come a long way, but there is still more work to do.***

*The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law on July 26, 1990 is described as,****“one of America’s most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life.”****1*

***Remember, if you have a disability, you have:***

***The right to vote***

***The right to access your polling place***

***The right to receive reasonable accommodations for your disability***

***At a time when there are so many challenges facing our state and country, and when we are faced with the dire consequences of the public health emergency created by the coronavirus, we must ensure disabled Vermonters employ their ability to vote which is safeguarded through the ADA.***

*One of the best ways to do that is through mail-in-voting.****Voting by mail is a simple, practical way to make sure our democracy works for all Vermonters, whether they have disabilities or not.****Already in Vermont more than 114,000 people have requested their ballot by mail.*

***To help navigate the best way to vote this year, we have assembled some resources for Vermonters with disabilities.****(If you know someone who could use this information, please don’t hesitate to forward this message.)*

[*The Vermont Secretary of State’s website*](https://u1584542.ct.sendgrid.net/ss/c/wehEm_vu1NBVXOKYSqOxTCRzW4Itb6Jgdi0HlNw7plGszM-iItwmAJbj9I4E3M409RFe0dDCb5VuyEZ18PoBazEMSwmK2omOvV6Dt1PHF3GVjYZ2TnuSeGfKbNanvKvWhQ5TPNO9dlqwtZFSVZUjfVWjHIxcuwCZ0sG3qWk8agfXHzdgEQrc-JG3bJ1NeTLi7CxHS7eoaaP60svjq00t3r2y_HAsqQ7B830P5O9d_csuTjrOBmPxswg7-yOM2Hgw2Fo6_ccxiQkEW-WUDjArBOvSQInydwuGPua_hhpofqnCPiR46SeUV50hsje9LF5oXQHcRrMKBwFNhEs3uTAFMV7TVlBdqXD8LNxgCOreRtlb-orHTwuMUtoL5csQJiZ0GgZFMPiJmWAJe2pqJ2ti5-Ah_hkDTmRXaCfIIm1xJ8Ce7qtrHm6EkY24CfhwkPQP/33s/gvLXezT0SLqcqS56Hyr7Uw/h1/CDKd_Jhssl38tJcPH9jHyf-NhoM8Lf2u2wbMS2xVs8s)*has a variety of resources available for Vermonters, and highlights one of the specific purposes of the Vermont Election Laws―”to provide equal opportunity for all citizens of voting age to participate in political processes.”*

*The state of Vermont also has developed an*[*Omni ballot*](https://u1584542.ct.sendgrid.net/ss/c/wehEm_vu1NBVXOKYSqOxTB_j56gvUqGyFVP2OLz6F-cZ2zsHEzM-qEmHHHiOWL7c6wAKpzLGzkZj69mKgB27q70mpcdHI7BAfxrTebsFc_DPhTvys-94cvUhfKp_qgs-MalF86YPuqcSEAPBz2UdrDbSBvHaTbYXpEvn41qIowA4IiqSF1orto8wS--rm4etqyTmhqdEB8O6u6M6IhJeROGJji5DS2ujDHcMVZPPabeXNeUM5G2NDahkIJ8Fqk5oUnWPK3tsJ1zAvNiW_KxW_WU4PKuvtMO1iNR6grF9FbY3x7ugZfe_djWrSliTv6MD9PwFXqHLIC9_kwk9C-ONWV366DFvmktCcyaUPDdp0otUJU75oiYikG__Bn6Wvpsyg7IJqWO_XiULCz8J3no4XvTYgVyDfD06Yl_dyjsMlkUbc642PAYbHgcLykOcrQQnB6fJhly-HfIMxQ6_YhBABQ/33s/gvLXezT0SLqcqS56Hyr7Uw/h2/4QcxNLvug6GA1S7-I6fcSML8q2eqWefTtzdZiGT_a0E)*which is a new accessible voting system for those who have disabilities.*

*Take a moment to share these helpful resources provided by the Vermont Secretary of State with friends and family to ensure every Vermonter has access to voting during this critical election year.****Remember, democracy only works when people express their voice at the ballot box.***

[***Don’t forget, early voting has already begun, and all Vermonters can request their ballot online through the Secretary of State’s website.***](https://u1584542.ct.sendgrid.net/ss/c/wehEm_vu1NBVXOKYSqOxTCRzW4Itb6Jgdi0HlNw7plGszM-iItwmAJbj9I4E3M4079R5G3kLcYMoqcYW-JlIoBJI8n4xoWF1WmaAJu927Pgdl5uchUJuFktCmEbZ8ugAiyqwcYQgoFqumSKJyPssNjfVIyIFQAydjiLDGQfCUo0rrm9GBoAEFqRoBxwbUXjS8FiBpo4XXpGj3-3PKddfofooTwDDeZ-ThGSSmRFlkEogXxbaH-bhOyK5f5z7OBqoeUHoaFER1IbsBu8YNsf7SMGmCZnh48Qde1DvgRUvUTcW1vvIhLyhGNTEe8N8WIMAq1itgHZx4MPvXKfAezwjeFn1fZi0K4inuXNzxtOTwjw4FbsH0-q7C56dozqpWPgwHZwVG0ta6ykwfEQmAFfksffhD67NZb3bkYr3uHDoz-eOda4apRix_6oiT2hGLtg17Iumzx7Rg6qAYjVghxzvaw/33s/gvLXezT0SLqcqS56Hyr7Uw/h3/kTYr9t7RhoDnFYWecYQuTp7G2fqh5LO9NH7xl7vOKs4)

***With the help of supporters like you, we are going to make sure Vermont’s next Governor shares our priorities.***

*Thank you for all you do to fight for a bold, new direction for Vermont.*

*Megan Polyte*

*Campaign Manager, Zuckerman for VT*

I understand that the path towards our collective goal is filled with both large policy steps, and small personal ones as well. That is why I have braille on my Lt. Governor business cards and have consistently made my office in the capitol building available to those who needed it when visiting Montpelier and advocating for their rights and the rights of Vermonters across the state.

**4. RespectAbility published *Disability in Philanthropy & Nonprofits*, 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?**

Rectifying unintentional exclusions like the ones mentioned above do not happen organically. It takes hard work and it takes statewide action to both raise awareness about these practices and force – either through a carrot or a stick – organizations to include people with disabilities. That is why I support providing incentives and support to Vermont businesses to hire people with disabilities. Knowing that those incentives are available will encourage greater awareness and rectification of underlying biases that exclude people with disabilities. I also support clear standards about including individuals with disabilities for government hiring practices and requirements for companies who receive Vermont government contracts.

**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. 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?**

Elevating the voices of diverse individuals including those with disabilities is one of the primary goals of my administration. I believe that we must have the on-the-ground individuals, stakeholders and organizations at the table when discussing how we move forward as a state. By elevating these voices we can begin to remove some of the stigma around people with disabilities. Supporting and incentivizing hiring practices that include more people with disabilities will also ensure that more individuals throughout the state will be working hand-in-hand with folks with disabilities: one of the first steps to breaking down stigma is to encourage communication and conversation.

**6. In our nation’s public schools, 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. 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 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?**

Our schools right now are being asked to provide far more than just an education. I held roundtable conversations earlier this year to hear their experiences teaching remotely. Those who were supporting English Language Learners and students with special needs were struggling the most to find ways to interact and assist their students.

I have been advocating for more alignment between the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services so we can ensure all Vermonters have access to the support they need. I recognize the transportation challenges many face to access services and think if they were embedded in local schools that would help. I also think continuity of services is extremely important for positive outcomes, and establishing a single location for education and services will greatly help with that. An added benefit to a collaborative program is it will reduce redundancy and save money.

**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?**

Below are some of my key priorities and how they will help improve the lives of people with disabilities:

As Governor, I will work to an economy that puts Vermonters back to work with decent paying jobs. This means raising the minimum wage and ensuring that our economy includes and encourages opportunities for people with disabilities.

I will expand broadband so everyone can access education, work and resources from their home. The expanded opportunities for telework will significantly impact people with disabilities as well as caregivers and rural Vermonters.

Food insecurity is both more common and tends to be more severe in households where one or more of the members have a disability. I will address food insecurity in those households and others throughout Vermont by increasing wages, and supporting farmers and local food production.

I will fight the climate crisis in a way that builds economic opportunity and ensures a healthy future.

I know how imperative it is to protect our State Colleges across the state. For rural students with disabilities, these schools can provide a close, and affordable option for secondary education. Without these colleges, the transportation issues and cost would significantly reduce options for students with disabilities in Vermont.

I will listen to our teachers, parents, students, and staff as we create a new normal in K-12 education. On-the-ground educators and especially special educators should be at the table in crafting our future in education.

I will increase healthcare access for all Vermonters and bring costs under control. This will significantly affect and help people with disabilities who, on average, incur far higher healthcare costs and prices from insurance companies than the average Vermonter.