**EDUCATION & SKILLS: What is your plan for ensuring that all students with disabilities, including English Language Learners, receive a quality and appropriate education to acquire critical and marketable skills?**

All students regardless of race, income, language, or disability status deserve a world-class education right here in Maryland. Nearly 12 percent of Maryland’s K-12 students (amounting to more than 98,000 kids) have a disability; of those, nearly two-thirds are students of color. And while Maryland’s high schools boast a graduation rate of about 87 percent across the board, only about 68 percent of students with disabilities will graduate in four years.

The Gansler administration is committed to closing that gap. We will be intentional and proactive in ensuring our students with disabilities can earn a high school diploma and transition to employment or higher education. Given the learning loss caused by the pandemic, we will devote the resources to offer students who have failed to graduate and ALL students with disabilities an additional year of public education. This opportunity is particularly critical for students with disabilities to be able to take advantage of transition-services that will help them become gainfully employed.

We will also ensure that youth transitioning out of public education understand the resources that are available to them as adults and that their curriculum includes not just financial literacy but also coursework on self-employment and entrepreneurship. We must also expand the highly-successful school-to-work transition program [Project SEARCH](https://www.projectsearch.us/find-a-program/)beyond Mayland’s metropolitan areas and into more rural areas.

The Gansler administration will also track evolving best practices and will work in close partnership with our educators, students, families and advocates to deliver a world-class education to all Maryland children.

**EMPLOYMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: If elected, what will you do to advance opportunities for people with disabilities who want to work and earn an income, just like anyone else? How will you support employers, large and small, to recruit and hire workers with disabilities? How will you promote evidence-based policies and best practices leading to meaningful careers as well as disability entrepreneurship opportunities?**

People with disabilities have so much to contribute to our communities and our economy, and 70 percent report that they want to work. The Gansler administration will take a three-prong approach toward addressing unemployment among people with disabilities. 1) Ensure people with disabilities are adequately prepared to succeed in a job 2). Ensure employers, especially small businesses, have the training and support to accommodate people with disabilities, and 3) directly connect employers to job seekers with disabilities.

Specifically, we will expand Project Search, offer an extra year of high school, and facilitate cohort-based apprenticeships for workers in the knowledge economy, as was recommended by RespectAbility to the Workforce Development Board. While the pandemic has cost 1 million people with disabilities their jobs, it has also shown us that remote work is possible and is often a very reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability.

We will also increase the incentive to hire people with disabilities by doubling the Maryland Disability Employment Tax Credit from 30 percent of the first $9000 of wages paid in the first and second year of employment to 30 percent of the first $18,000 paid in the first and second years of employment.

We will rely heavily on evidenced-based policies and evolving best practices to ensure students with disabilities can succeed, whether they choose to work for an employer or pursue their own path of entrepreneurship. We look forward to having RespectAbility as a partner at the table as we formulate policy.

**ACCESS & INCLUSION: Whether or not you have a formal platform, what specific plans do you have to incorporate the voices of people with disabilities into your decision-making processes, if elected? What steps, if any, have you taken to make your campaign accessible for people with disabilities and to ensure that our voices are heard?**

Representation matters, and the Gansler administration is committed to ensuring the disability community has a powerful voice and seat at the table. This means the state of Maryland must be a model employer. The Gansler Administration will set an ambitious goal that within 5 years, at least 5 percent of state employees have self-reported a disability. To do this, we will first do a deep dive to assess the efficacy of the Special Options Eligible List and Disability Preference Points System with an eye toward potentially expanding the program. Montgomery County also [has an excellent program to promote the hiring of people with disabilities](https://www.respectability.org/Resources/RA%20Webinar%20Montgomery%20County%20MD.pdf), and the Gansler administration will study that program and incentivize other counties to adopt something similar.

My own campaign is also making an effort to be more inclusive, as we started [captioning the videos](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=314860420267954) we post to social media and are doing an audit of our website to determine how to make it accessible.

**FIGHTING STIGMAS: If elected, what will be your plan to fight stigmas, highlight the disability community, and promote higher expectations for success?**

My nephew, Vance, has severe autism and cerebral palsy. When he was a baby, the doctors told his parents he would never walk, talk, read or write, but now he can do all of those things. He has worked as a ticket-taker for four years, and he even got to work the World Series for the Atlanta Braves this year. I proudly shared Vance’s video “[Bumblebee](https://twitter.com/DougGansler/status/1454814456991690756)”, which is about blowing past low expectations, to social media.

I want every Marylander who has been underestimated to be offered the same opportunities my nephew got to reach his full potential, and I want them to be heard and seen. Too often when people think about diversity, they don’t think about people with disabilities. Visibility matters, and I will work to consciously celebrate and elevate the disability community, including the autism community. That’s why my campaign is proposing the first permanent, standing [Maryland Autism Commission](https://douggansler.com/mental-health-matters/).

**OTHER KEY ISSUES: 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? If you have yet to develop them, what is your plan to learn about disability issues?**

As Attorney General, I fought to protect adults with disabilities [who were criminally neglected](https://oig.hhs.gov/fraud/enforcement/ag-gansler-caregiver-pleads-guilty-to-neglect-of-a-vulnerable-adult/), and as governor, I will look at every issue through the lens of disability justice. My [veterans plan](https://douggansler.com/veterans/) provides tax subsidies to encourage employers to hire disabled veterans. My Green Maryland plan will expand public transportation access, which is critical for many people with disabilities who might not have another way to get to work or participate in their communities. I look forward to learning more from RespectAbility as we continue to build out policy so that we can make Maryland a more accessible and inclusive place for people with disAbilities.