



**New York State Senate and Assembly Joint Budget Hearing on Higher Education  
Testimony Submitted by David J. Adams, Senior Vice President of Government Relations  
Universal Workforce Readiness Program  
February 25, 2025**

**TESTIMONY REMARKS:**

Thank you, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky, Hyndman, and members of the legislature. My name is David Adams, Senior Vice President of Government Relations and General Counsel at Kaplan North America.

I'm happy to submit testimony today regarding the benefits of access to high-quality exam and licensure preparation; this access can level the playing field, open education and workforce opportunities for all students regardless of background, and help solve the workforce shortages across the state, including for essential professions like doctors, nurses, engineers, and teachers. Many of you may know Kaplan for its long history of preparing students for high-stakes admissions and licensure tests. What fewer know is that Kaplan was founded in a Brooklyn basement in 1938 on the belief in the power of education to open doors to success, regardless of background or economic status. Our founder, Stanley Kaplan, was a New York City-born son of Jewish immigrants who attended City College but was denied access to medical school because of anti-Semitic admissions policies at medical schools at that time. That experience drove him to become a champion for standardized admissions exams – he believed that a strong score could level the playing field for students from working-class and immigrant backgrounds.

Today, high stakes testing for licenses in careers like nursing and real estate and admission to professional schools like medicine and law remain a required hurdle which students must clear to gain access to rewarding careers. Yet, due to the cost of these exams and the necessary preparation courses and materials to succeed on those exams, that hurdle remains especially daunting for underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students. Students who cannot afford the costs of test preparation are often getting shortchanged and left behind; we know from years of data that students cannot pass or do well on most such exams without access to quality test preparation programs. Because of this, we have seen that economically advantaged students outperform lower-income students on tests, thereby accessing significantly more scholarships for graduate school and entering the workforce with a significant head start. In short, instead of evening the playing field, high-stakes exams are too often oversized obstacles on the path to career success. And the lack of a stronger and longer talent pipeline is impacting millions of New Yorkers, who all need the critical services of talented doctors, teachers, and nurses, among other professions. And this is not just a regional problem impacting only urban, suburban, or rural residents. This is an issue felt across the state.



Over the last few years Kaplan's university partners, including schools in the SUNY and CUNY system, have come to us sounding the alarm and asking for help closing this opportunity gap. Some states like Illinois have already seized the initiative and have begun offering universal access to license and testing preparation courses across their public system to address broad workforce priorities. Giving states the robust and innovative tools they need to drive student success and fill workforce needs as well as a critical tool to keep students in the state post-graduation.

As part of the State's ongoing efforts to address demographic and economic challenges in New York's workforce, a Universal Workforce Readiness Program would be an important and beneficial addition to the state, its students, and its 20 million residents.

A readiness program in New York would cover professions such as Nursing, Teaching, Engineering, Data Science, Business, Real Estate, Insurance, Law, Medicine, and Financial Services, empowering students with resources to pass these license and admissions exams while:

- **Cumulatively saving New York students millions of dollars who are either paying these costs or forgoing test prep altogether:**
  - The cost of test prep and credentials is yet another "cost of college" that students and families must pay. It's a cost that many, understandably, don't take into account before embarking on this career journey. Cleveland State University, a public research university, implemented a universal access program for its students and has calculated that in the first two years, they have enrolled almost 1000 students in courses which has saved their students over \$1million in graduate school and professional licensure exam prep. NYU implemented a similar school-wide program in January 2024. Since then, over 3,000 NYU students have enrolled in preparation courses. Both students and school administrators have publicly recognized the program as a game changer in expanding access.
  
- **Improving matriculation to graduate programs and licensure pass rates:**
  - Universal test prep strengthens our workforce by expanding access to graduate, business, law, and medical education and improve license pass rates in critical fields like nursing, teaching and engineering. This investment boosts economic mobility, supports state competitiveness, and ensures a well-prepared workforce to meet future demands. Two of the over a dozen private HBCUs that have implemented a universal access program, Howard University and Xavier University of Louisiana, have pre-med programs that are consistently among the



top four-year programs in the United States and graduate a high number of Black students who go on to become medical doctors.

- **Improving employability through industry recognized credentials:**
  - A comprehensive program also includes access to industry recognized credentials in areas like project management and data science. While licensure is necessary for many professions, having access to higher-level credentials helps students become more well-rounded in their overall education skill set and employability. Credentials increase the value of a degree, both perceived and tangible, and position graduates more effectively within the job market.
  
- **Providing New York’s public universities with a powerful recruiting advantage and major incentive to keep our students within the State.**
  - Eliminating the cost burden of preparing for graduate-level admissions and licensing exams, state colleges would show a commitment to student success. Universal Workforce Readiness builds on New York’s Excelsior program by ensuring more students, especially from underserved communities, can succeed as they move into their careers. It reinforces the state’s commitment to affordability, accessibility, and student success from application to graduation. Kaplan has seen this holistic approach strengthen recruitment, retention, and workforce readiness at our multiple institution partners.
  
- **Providing New York with valuable state and institutional level aggregate data including student career path, program use and completion, exam preparedness, and job interest to inform workforce policy priorities.**
  - The program uses a centralized portal to provide students with access to program resources. By managing this portal and program at the state level significant data on student program use, exam success/pass rates, and post college career attainment is compiled and shared with universities and policymakers in real time to enable critical decisions on workforce development and education resource allocation. Universities will have greater insight into the post-graduation student pathways and their success in career preparation and the state will gain significant individual level data on trends on graduate entry into critically needed careers and the overall workforce.



In closing, I ask that the legislature support funding for a Universal Workforce Readiness Program as it is a critical investment in New York's no-so-distant and long-term future. Once funded this program would immediately begin providing equitable access to high-quality test preparation resources, helping to ensure that all students have a fair shot at success, strengthening the state's workforce, boosting economic mobility, and making us more competitive. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.