

## NY audit shows unlicensed career schools

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ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — There's little oversight of New York's hundreds of private career schools, with most failing to file required graduation and job placement reports, state auditors reported Thursday.

The schools, with about 46,000 students in fields such as computer programming, cosmetology and business, are required be registered or licensed by the state Education Department if they charge tuition. The audit covered more than three years through June 2012 and noted more than 1,000 open investigations, more than half at least a decade old.

A sample of 100 cases showed 18 schools without licenses — though some may not have been operating — which indicates a considerable risk that many other schools are unlicensed, according to the report.

"There's alarmingly little oversight of private career schools in New York, leaving too many young adults vulnerable to false promises," Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said. "Millions of dollars and the education of thousands of New Yorkers are at stake."

In its audit response, the Education Department said updated computer systems will improve oversight, while legislation last year raising the schools' licensing application fee from \$250 to \$5,000 will help.

Deputy Education Commissioner Kevin Smith said a half-dozen staffers have been added and the new data system is expected to be fully functional in nine months to a year. The schools, which number around 450, will be able to access the system and know the status of their applications, teacher licensing and curriculum approvals, he said.

"Schools open and schools close fairly rapidly. It's a fairly dynamic sector," Smith said. The higher application fee, closer to the national standard, is expected to slow that down.

The report found that 292 schools out of 491, or almost 60 percent, didn't submit required reports about enrollment, graduation and job placement, and as a result, the department has no record of whether they achieved what they promoted.

Auditors recommended processing license applications within one year, establishing time frames for prioritizing and completing investigations, and developing processes for following up on schools that don't file reports and disciplining them.

The schools have pushed back at the federal level against reporting requirements about graduations and job placements that public institutions don't have to file, Smith said. About the open cases, he said some simply hadn't been closed administratively, and the Education Department lacks authority to investigate beyond sending letters to unlicensed schools, referring those cases to other agencies including the attorney general or Department of State.