

New faces expected to make up Cuomo's reform task force

by [Geoff Decker](#), at 8:58 pm

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When Gov. Andrew Cuomo convenes the education reform commission he promised today, there are likely to be some new faces in the room.

Cuomo signaled that he was tired of business as usual during his State of the State address today, saying that special interest education groups, such as lobbyists for teachers, principals, and superintendents, [have come to overshadow the true mission of public education](#).

"The purpose of public education is not to help grow the public education bureaucracy," Cuomo said in his speech. The status quo, he said, is "driven by the business of education more than achievement in education."

Cuomo said that the education commission would be the driving force behind his pledge to toughen teacher evaluations and make the state's education spending more efficient. He said the commission would be bi-partisan and include joint appointments from the legislature, but was not specific about what the makeup would look like.

Two people who work closely on state and city education policies said that they expected the commission to be made up at least in part of people from outside the state.

"It will be something that's quite national, people from outside New York," a source said. "It won't be people from the usual crowd."

Where those people could come from – whether it's academia, advocacy or foundation-funded research arms – is not clear. Officials from Cuomo's office did not respond to emails and phone calls seeking comment.

Previous task forces, including the one formed by the state education department to make recommendations on a [NCLB waiver](#), are a [who's who of statewide education groups](#).

But when Cuomo put together his own commission to tackle government spending he leaned heavily on business executives. **The task force, known as the SAGE Commission, also included Simone Levinson, a philanthropist on the board of Turnaround for Children whose bio is described as an "education reformer."**

"I get the sense they are envisioning a mix of people, outsiders and also people with day-to-day involvement in schools," said Bob Lowry, of the New York State Council of School Superintendents.

Without getting word about whether or not they'd be included, education group representatives we spoke to today sounded cautious optimism about the commission and offered their own spin on how it should be operated.

"If there is a commission that's actually going to look at research and not be about ideology then I think that's something we should all look at," said United Federation of Teachers president Michael Mulgrew. Mulgrew added he was wary about how much emphasis the commission would give to test prep.

Elizabeth Ling, of Democrats for Education Reform, a political action committee that lobbies for policies that teachers unions typically oppose, said she expected to hold Cuomo accountable by putting together a commission that would not be allied to unions.

"Our view on the education commission is that it's a great opportunity, if it's done the right way," Ling said. "He should select people who can move his agenda forward to make real progress on behalf of students, and not the hacks who have only thrown up roadblocks time and again."

Even as he welcomed fresh new faces to reform commission, Lowry said that insiders such as the superintendents that he represents are just as important to coming up with solutions.

"Sometimes there's kind of an impulse to assume everyone working in the system now are wedded to the status quo, but it's not necessarily so," Lowry said. "You also need to have people who know what things work now and what things don't work now."

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President Pam Cantor praised Levinson's work on the SAGE Commission as well as her role as Vice Chair of Turnaround for Children's Board:

"Simone cares deeply about issues of education reform and equity, and is an invaluable asset to Turnaround for Children. As Vice Chair of our Board, Simone has introduced us to scores of like-minded people of influence from the business and philanthropic worlds, media and the arts, as well as local and national policy-makers. We are thrilled that Governor Cuomo has appointed such a strategic thinker and passionate advocate to the SAGE Commission and expect her to make a significant contribution to this challenging process."