When crisis strikes, teachers are there

Randi Weingarten, President
American Federation of Teachers

It will surprise absolutely no one that I love being in schools. Since April 2021, I have visited more than 100 schools across the country, seeing how students and staff are overcoming the challenges created by the pandemic, and talking to them about what they need to recover and thrive. Last week, I went home, so to speak, to University Prep Charter School in the South Bronx, an outstanding public charter school that I helped establish with Steve Barr in 2009. Tragically, the visit was to mourn the shooting death of Angelly Yambo, a beautiful, bright 16-year-old University Prep student who was caught in crossfire as she walked home from school.

I saw many expressions of grief—unstoppable tears, friends clinging to each other, and students walking somberly through quiet hallways that typically are pulsing with noise and activity. I also saw the earliest efforts to help students work through their loss and fears—from grief counselors to increased security in and around the school. I saw school staff huddled with students, setting aside their own grief to provide a steady presence amid the turmoil of students’ trauma and sorrow. Only days later, educators stepped into that role again after the horrendous shootings in a Brooklyn subway station just blocks from three public schools.

Teach...