



A Union of Professionals



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Randi Weingarten

President
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RANDI WEINGARTEN is president of the 1.7 million-member American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, which represents teachers; paraprofessionals and school-related personnel; higher education faculty and staff; nurses and other healthcare professionals; local, state and federal government employees; and early childhood educators. The AFT is dedicated to the belief that every person in America deserves the freedom to thrive, fueled by opportunity, justice and a voice in our democracy. This freedom is achieved through an economy that works for all, including the ability to form a union; great public schools and affordable higher education; healthcare as a right; retirement security; the right to vote and civil rights; a vibrant democracy; and safe, welcoming and healthy environments and communities. The AFT and its members advance these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through members' work—we care, fight, show up and vote.

Prior to her election as AFT president in 2008, Weingarten served for 12 years as president of the United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2, representing approximately 200,000 educators in the New York City public school system, as well as home child care providers and other workers in health, law and education. Weingarten is the recipient of many commendations; she was included in *Washingtonian's* 2021 Washington's Most Influential People, *City & State New York's* 2018 Labor Power 50 and 50 Over Fifty, and *Washington Life's* 2018 Power 100 list of prominent leaders, and in 2017 received the Roosevelt Institute's FDR Distinguished Public Service Award. In 2013, the *New York Observer* named

Weingarten one of the most influential New Yorkers of the past 25 years.

Weingarten has led the AFT's efforts to strengthen public education for all children and to address the crisis in the teaching profession caused by deep disinvestment and the deprofessionalization of teaching. Through the AFT's Fund Our Future campaign, AFT members and leaders throughout the country are fighting for adequate investment in public education. Parents and many others have joined the AFT's efforts to end the overuse and misuse of standardized tests, and to fix—not close—struggling schools, something Weingarten has advocated since her involvement in the creation of New York City's Chancellor's District, which dramatically improved achievement in what had been some of the city's lowest-performing schools.

Weingarten has launched major efforts to place real education reform high on the nation's and her union's agendas. She created the AFT Innovation Fund, a groundbreaking initiative to support sustainable, innovative and collaborative education reform projects developed by members and their local unions. At Weingarten's direction, the AFT developed a model to transform teacher evaluations from a way of simply rating teachers to a tool for continuous improvement and feedback. This model is used to align tenure and due process, so that tenure serves as a guarantee of fairness, not of a job for life. Weingarten led an AFT committee that called for all prospective teachers to meet a high entry standard—as in medicine or law—so that they're prepared from the day they enter the classroom.

Weingarten oversaw the development of the AFT's Quality Education Agenda, which advocates for reforms grounded in evidence, equity, scalability and sustainability. She promotes what she calls "solution-driven unionism"—an approach to collective bargaining and collective action that unites the interests of union members and those they serve in the pursuit of solutions that benefit students, schools and communities.

Under Weingarten's leadership, the AFT continues to grow and expand its voice as a union of professionals. Nationwide, the AFT is the second-largest union of nurses and other health professionals and the largest higher education union, representing 230,000 higher education faculty, professional staff and graduate employees. Weingarten helped source millions of dollars of personal protective equipment for nurses and health professionals experiencing shortages as they served on the frontlines of the coronavirus pandemic.

Weingarten is an advocate for a New Deal for Higher Education, a campaign calling for substantial federal investment in higher education that would prioritize teaching, research and student supports; provide sustainable careers with professional voice for all faculty and staff; allow all students to attend regardless of ability to pay; create academic environments free of racism and other forms of bigotry; and cancel student debt.

The AFT provides our members tools and information they can use to manage their federal student loan debt, including having that debt forgiven, while advocating for solutions to the escalating cost of higher education, predatory loan practices, and terrible loan servicing that is holding people back.

The AFT and a broad array of parent and community partners across the country have collaborated on events to advance a community- and educator-driven agenda for public school reform.

Weingarten spearheaded the development of Share My Lesson, the United States' largest free collection of lesson plans,

classroom activities, and teaching strategies and resources created by educators, for educators—all at no cost. The AFT has a long-standing partnership with First Book, which has provided 5 million free and reduced-price books to children.

Weingarten and the AFT were asked to lead a partnership to transform McDowell County, W.Va., one of the poorest counties in the United States. The AFT has assembled more than 100 partners not only to improve the quality of education provided to children in the county, but to focus on jobs, transportation, recreation, housing, healthcare and social services. Weingarten believes the rural way of life is worth fighting for, and the AFT's experience in McDowell County informs the work Weingarten is advancing to help rural communities thrive—through education, healthcare and economic opportunities.

The AFT supports the strategic establishment of 25,000 community schools where students and families can access tailored health services and social services in one place, and marginalized communities can have access to services and support. Weingarten views this goal as especially vital to help children, families and communities recover from the wide-ranging impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and ensuing recession.

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, the AFT worked with scientists and health professionals to develop a blueprint for reopening schools. The AFT continues to advocate for the funding and necessary testing and safety protocols to ensure in-person learning is safe.

During the Trump administration, Weingarten led the AFT's efforts to oppose Trump and Betsy DeVos' fervent attempts to defund and destabilize public education and to stand up to the administration's racist policies and attacks on facts and democracy.

In 2012-13, Weingarten served on an education reform commission convened by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, which made a series of recommendations to improve teaching and learning. She was appointed to the Equity and Excellence

Commission, a federal advisory committee chartered by Congress to examine and make recommendations concerning the disparities in educational opportunities that give rise to the achievement gap.

For 10 years, while president of the UFT, Weingarten chaired New York City's Municipal Labor Committee, an umbrella organization for the city's 100-plus public sector unions, including those representing higher education and other public service employees. As chair of the MLC, she coordinated labor negotiations and bargaining for benefits on behalf of the MLC unions' 365,000 members.

From 1986 to 1998, Weingarten served as counsel to UFT President Sandra Feldman, taking a lead role in contract negotiations and enforcement, and in lawsuits in which the union fought for adequate school funding and building conditions. A teacher of history at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood from 1991 to 1997, Weingarten helped her students win several state and national awards debating constitutional issues.

Elected as the local union's assistant secretary in 1995 and as treasurer two years later, she became UFT president after Feldman became president of the AFT. Weingarten was elected to her first full term as UFT president in 1998 and was re-elected three times.

Weingarten's column "What Matters Most" appears in the *New York Times*' Sunday Review the third Sunday of each month. You can follow her on Twitter at @rweingarten (Twitter.com/rweingarten) and on Facebook (Facebook.com/randi.weingarten.9).

Weingarten holds degrees from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Cardozo School of Law. She worked as a lawyer for the Wall Street firm of Stroock & Stroock & Lavan from 1983 to 1986. She is an active member of the Democratic National Committee and numerous professional, civic and philanthropic organizations. Born in 1957 and raised in Rockland County, N.Y., Weingarten now resides in the Inwood neighborhood of New York City.