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Patriot Prez helps kids deal with fear

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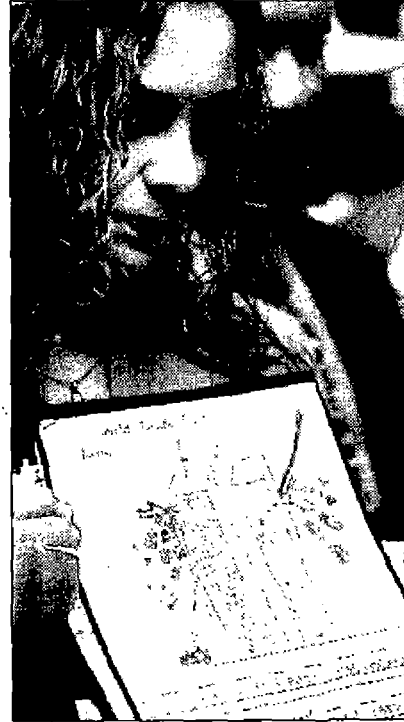
President Bush tried yesterday to comfort some of the littlest witnesses to the World Trade Center catastrophe.

The students at Public School 130 in Chinatown used to have a direct view of the World Trade Center, and some even saw the planes slam into the towers.

Bush, on his second visit to lower Manhattan since the Sept. 11 attacks, told the children not to be afraid — and that their teachers were there for them.

"If you have any worries about what took place at the World Trade Center, they will help you," Bush told a class of first-graders at the Baxter St. school. "They will comfort you. They want to make sure you understand what went on."

Signs of how the disaster has affected the 1,200 students abounded: There were crayon drawings of burning planes



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and crumbling buildings hanging in some of the classrooms. One of the drawings was titled, "The Day We Were Very Sad."

"He knows what happened," Cyndi Zhu said of her son, Rick, a third-grader at the school. "We shouldn't hide everything."

The students, most of whom live in Chinatown, were locked out of their school for almost a week after the attacks.

Yesterday Bush, Mayor Giuliani and Gov. Pataki led Debra Nelson's first-grade class in the Pledge of Allegiance and then admired the students' patriotic posters, on which the kids listed the reasons they love the United States.

"I love America

because the flag is nice and because it has good restaurants," one poster signed by a student named Ezra read.

Before walking next door to meet Barbara Seeto's kindergarten class, Bush scrawled his own reason for loving America on another poster.

He wrote: "I love America because I love freedom."

Nelson said the President gave all of them a lift.

"I'm very glad he came," she said. "I'm sure the kids are, too."

Other teachers said they needed a morale boost after days of trying to explain the unexplainable to their youngsters.

"I just talk to get out my feelings, so I don't have them inside me forever," said fifth-grader Sharlene Fermin.

Many of the kids carried stuffed animals for comfort and clung to their parents. Teachers reported that the school counselors had to calm nervous students down after fire drills.

"We had to tell them that they will hear bells and they see lights, but that it's not real," said Principal Lily Woo.

FEELINGS Teacher Debra Nelson holds picture drawn by student after Trade Center attacks.

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