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Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, leans in to hear second-grader Jerry Gamble, 7, during a Tuesday visit*to Taylor Academy in Millvale.

National union official: CPS deal is reachable

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The head of the national teachers union weighed in on Cincinnati's stalled union negotiations during a visit Tuesday to the Queen City.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said she thinks the issues that are holding back negotiations between the Cincinnati Public Schools and its teachers' union can be resolved – but only if both sides focus on education and not politics.

"This is a place where you can build on what works rather than starting from scratch," she said during a meeting with Enquirer editors and reporters. "I think (the negotiations) became what is the political result one wants as opposed to what is the educational result one wants. If it's about the educational results, this is imminently solvable. If it's about the political results, it's not. It will go to fact-finding."

This week marks the start of the ninth month without a new contract for the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers, which represents its 2,300 teachers and the 300 clerical workers in the Association of Cin-

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Randi Weingarten, American Federation of Teachers president

cinnati Public School Office Personnel.

During a whirlwind trip in Cincinnati, Weingarten, a prominent figure in the national discussion on education reform, gave a speech and met with local labor groups at a Labor Day rally Monday. On Tuesday she sat down with business and nonprofit leaders and toured the Ethel M. Taylor Academy, a pre-K-8 community learning center school in Millvale. She praised the district for its community learning center schools, its Effective rating on the state report card and its reform-minded teachers and community.

But Weingarten said there remain some fundamental disagreements between the local teachers' union and the district on teacher evaluations.

"They (the district) want to jettison the progressive teacher evaluation system," said Weingarten. She thinks the system needs to be

changed, not scrapped.

Weingarten also opposes basing teacher evaluations primarily on students' test scores – another touchy topic of negotiations.

The teaching contract is important because it ultimately will address things from teacher pay and placement to student testing and discipline.

Weingarten praised the Taylor Academy, which doubles as a community center. The school partners with businesses and community groups to offer extra services such as tutoring, mentoring, college help and after-school programs.

"The only place that has wrap-around services like this is Canada," marveled Weingarten.

"How do we shine a spotlight on how good Cincinnati is doing?" she asked. "If they (the business world) understood what we're doing here, Cincinnati could be a model for the rest of the country."