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New national chief of teachers union calls for full-service schools

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The newly elected head of the nation's largest teachers union on Monday called on school districts nationwide to create community schools that would offer services to students and their families ranging from health care to recreation. Speaking to about 3,300 conventioners at Navy Pier, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said minority students need the help to bridge the achievement gap between them and their white counterparts. Weingarten, who was picked Monday to head the 1.4 million member union, called on federal officials to draft legislation that would create schools that could offer "dental, medical and counseling clinics," along with other services. "Can you imagine a federal law that promoted community schools: schools that serve the neediest children by bringing together under one roof all the services and activities they and their families need?" Weingarten said.

Weingarten acknowledged she has not determined the cost of such schools or how many the nation needs. She pointed, however, to Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., where the mayors control the local schools and she said they could get the money to pay for social services. "We are trying to propose a new way of looking at schooling."

Chicago Public Schools officials said they support the idea. They have been working to transform the district's schools into community centers that open beyond the traditional school day and offer services to neighborhoods, city schools spokesman Michael Vaughn said.

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