



# BPS and BTU reach tentative agreement

Serghino René

After months of negotiations and talk of a potential strike, the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and Boston Public School (BPS) officials recently reached a tentative agreement on a new teachers' contract through school year 2009-2010.

"We are proud of the agreement that has been reached with the Boston Teachers Union and appreciate their support in reforming our underperforming schools," said Mayor Thomas M. Menino. "We believe this contract gives us the flexibility to hire top-notch educators who have the tools and resources they need to prepare our students for a successful future."

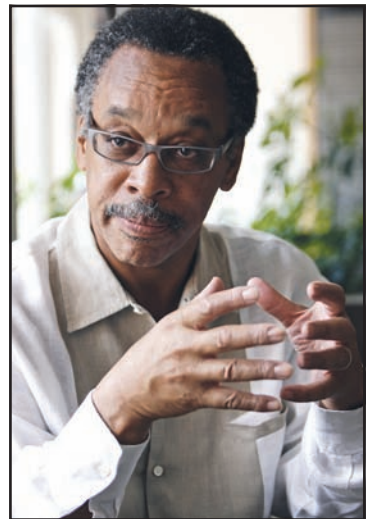
BTU and BPS reached a consensus on several key issues.

The proposed contract includes greater flexibility in 20 low-performing schools — called "superintendent's schools" — as well as maintaining small class sizes, the creation of at least seven new pilot schools, changes to the performance evaluation process and salary increases of approximately 13 percent over four years. Those salary boosts come in addition to the step increases of 5 to 7 percent each year already built into the contract and a gradual increase in employee share of health insurance premiums from 10 percent to 15 percent by 2009.

Also included in the proposal is the launch of the New Teacher Developer program, in which experienced teachers mentor new teachers in the classroom, and a Peer Assistance Schools, continued to page 6



(Foreground, from left): U.S. Navy sailors Atif Omer, Roger Villalta, Alex Litovtchenko and Pamela Leach, all stationed aboard the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy, are sworn in as U.S. citizens during a special citizenship ceremony aboard the carrier last Friday in Boston. Admiral Harold Starling watches in the background, second from right. More than 300 residents took the Oath of Allegiance to become citizens during the ceremony aboard the ship during its final visit to Boston before being decommissioned in Florida later this month. (AP photo/Lisa Poole)



Former NAACP President Bruce S. Gordon responds to a question during an interview in New York in this June 2006 file photo. Gordon has quit the civil rights organization after just 19 months at the helm. (AP photo/Seth Wenig)

# As Gordon exits, NAACP pledges focus on activism

Erin Teixeira

NEW YORK — Bruce S. Gordon quit as NAACP president after clashing with the board over the group's modern-day mission, a move that highlights a stubborn problem for activists: how to do civil rights work in an era decades after the movement's peak.

Should the NAACP have allowed Gordon, as Chairman Julian Bond put it, to "pull [them] into the post-civil rights period?"

Bond firmly rejected the idea. "We're not post-civil rights," he said. "The struggle continues."

Bond and other members of the 64-person board he leads believe that, though dramatic gains have been made in race relations since the 1950s, the movement has not yet completed its task — and won't until persistent racial gaps in achievement and opportunity disappear.

Few American blacks would quibble that equality remains an unfulfilled dream.

Gordon recognizes that, too. He often sparked applause among NAACP rank-and-file when he paraphrased Charles Dickens, telling them that, "for African Americans, this is the best of times and the worst of times."

But the question remains: how should the NAACP address the "worst" part?

The Baltimore-based National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, since its founding in 1909, has focused on advocacy

— raising public awareness of inequality — not service. For instance, to combat black unemployment, the group would hold protest marches, gather signatures and lobby elected officials for better public policy. It would not offer skills training or make job referrals.

But from the start of his presidency, Gordon made clear he wanted to do more of the latter — and he repeatedly resisted being reined in by the NAACP's traditional mission or its enforcement body, the board of directors. In an interview with The Baltimore Sun, Gordon acknowledged that NAACP Chairman Julian Bond had to talk him out of quitting just weeks after he took over in the summer of 2005.

Gordon rankled many board members when he traveled the country. NAACP, continued to page 11

# Closing gaps in minority health care

Serghino René

Alice Coombs' brother had a stroke.

As an anesthesiologist at South Shore Hospital in Weymouth, she was concerned about the type of therapy he might receive. After a number of telephone conversations with her brother's caregivers, she became really concerned.

Coombs acted fast.

She took a Southwest Airlines flight from Providence to Baltimore, got on a standby flight from Baltimore to San Diego, rented a car and drove from San Diego to Fontana, finally arriving in her brother's hospital room. But to her astonishment, her brother had not seen a neurologist yet.

"About 18 hours later, the neurologist walks into the room and I

ask, 'Why is it that I can come from the east coast all the way to the west coast before my brother can see a neurologist?'" said Coombs. "I specifically requested one before I boarded my plane from Providence."

It was this experience that spurred her to further pursue her ongoing efforts to help eliminate health disparities in treatment for minorities.

Coombs, assistant treasurer of the Massachusetts Medical Society, was one of several health care professionals to attend the American Medical Association's Commission to End Healthcare Disparities Spring Meeting. Held at the Massachusetts Medical Society Headquarters in Waltham, the meeting was a large-scale effort to educate physicians and health professionals about health care disparities while identi-



Dr. Alice Coombs, anesthesiologist at South Shore Hospital and assistant treasurer of the Massachusetts Medical Society, is seen here demonstrating a mock anesthetic induction on a young girl. (Photo courtesy of Massachusetts Medical Society)

fying and developing strategies to eliminate racial and ethnic gaps in health care.

"This meeting was an effort to

bring the racial and ethnic disparities that exist in health care to the forefront of people's minds," said Sandra Gadson, president of the Na-

tional Medical Association. "We hope people leave here more informed and aware because the goal is to make the practice of medicine and other aspects of health care more accessible, affordable and culturally competent."

Despite overall improvements in American health, minorities are behind on nearly every health indicator, including health care coverage, life expectancy and disease rates. Studies indicate that minority physicians are more likely than white physicians to practice in underserved areas and care for minority, poor, underinsured and uninsured people.

Coombs said there is no racial parity between the number of minority physicians and the minority patients who seek care.

According to national demographics, 25 percent of the population is comprised of underrepresented minorities — African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans. Out of that, only 6 percent are physicians and 9 percent are nurses. However,

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