

## Family Support Is Key to More Diversity in Advanced Classes

Annandale High School in Fairfax County, Virginia is a typical inner-ring suburb. Formerly an all-white middle- and working-class student population, it now looks like the United Nations. Once a school that retained its white middle-class families by offering gifted programs, it now offers a challenging program open to all students.

Program coordinator Erin Albright says that engaging parents in the decision to take the advanced program has been an important strategy in the program's success. She uses these approaches to build low-income and immigrant parent support for the advanced program:

- Parent information nights at the feeder middle schools. Information is tailored to families' backgrounds, including explaining how the U.S. education system works.
- Workshops and meetings in families' languages or with an interpreter. Start with the families' expectations for their children. What do they want for their children? How can they use this program to meet their goals?
- Planning for college, taking families' concerns in mind. Many families from overseas do not want their children to go far from home, or for their daughters to live in dormitories. Cost is a major concern, too. Options include attending community college for two years while living at home, then transferring to a four-year college.
- Using eighth grade parents' night, freshman orientation, and advanced program orientation to present high-level goals for students.
- Recruiting bilingual parents and students in the program to get the word out to other families.
- Working through the school's parent liaisons. They get the message across to families that advanced classes are open—and there is a person at the school they can talk to.<sup>14</sup>

