

# Middle schoolers get college-level help

*Collegians serve as math, science, tech mentors*

By ROBERT SALONGA  
The Salinas Californian

Forty students at North Monterey County Middle School in Castroville will bask in the wisdom of their elders as college students serve as mentors in a new science, mathematics, and technology after-school program.

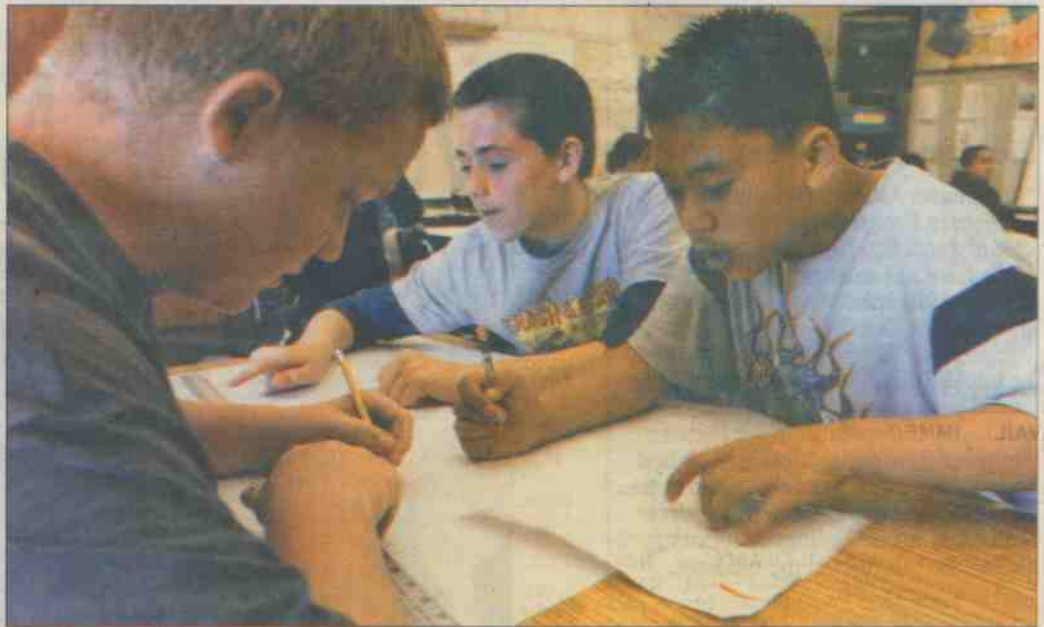
Thanks to a \$50,000 grant from the NCCEP/AT&T Foundation, two students from the University of California, Santa Cruz will team up with two math teachers at the middle school to run extracurricular sessions three times a week.

After-school activities that offer different modes of teaching can help reach students who otherwise might not succeed in the traditional classroom environment, said Principal David Burke.

"Hands-on learning is the key to inspiring and motivating these students to higher levels of achievement," Burke said.

The sessions will focus on helping students design and conduct scientific experiments, then learn ways to share their findings by designing a Web site, producing video presentations, preparing public presentations about their projects and practicing their public speaking skills.

"The goal is to use a lot of hands-on projects," said Jamie Vargas, director of development at the UCSC Educational Partnership Center, which is coordinat-



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ing the program. "We're also trying to get kids to take these projects to the science fair." The after-school program bolsters the Center's "Building Bridges to College" effort, an ongoing partnership with several schools in north Monterey County paid for through the federal Gaining Early Awareness & Readiness for Undergraduate Programs project (GEAR UP). It targets low-income, predominately Hispanic students in seventh and eighth grade, many of whom are English-language learners, and aims at getting students on track to attend college.

Many of the seventh- and eighth-grade students participating in the program will be the first in their fam-

ily to go to college, Burke said. Another treat for students in the program: a campus tour, participation in college science competitions and meetings with staff at the UCSC Baskin School of Engineering. As an added bonus: the school gets to keep the supplies paid for by the grant, including scientific equip-

ment and computer hardware and software.

## DETAILS

About 40 seventh- and eighth-graders will be selected for the program based on their involvement in other math- and science-related activities, teacher recommendations and whether they would benefit from non-traditional classroom time, Vargas said.

She noted, however, that the program is open to everyone, and encouraged interested parents to contact the campus and school for more information.

Vargas said she expects the program to get up and running by mid-October and continue through the rest of the school year.

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Section E, page 2