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UCSC students mentor youth in new science/math after-school program

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

UCSC academic interns will team up with two teachers to bring science and math to life three afternoons a week, providing academic enrichment activities and giving many of the children their first glimpse of college life.

Many of the seventh- and eighth-grade students participating in the program will be the first in their family to go to college, noted principal David Burke. After-school activities that offer different modes of teaching can help reach students who otherwise might not succeed in the traditional classroom environment, he said. "Hands-on learning is the key to inspiring and motivating these students to higher levels of achievement," said Burke.

The middle school students will design and conduct scientific experiments, design a web site, produce video presentations, prepare public presentations about their projects, and practice their public speaking skills. They will also tour the UCSC campus, participate in science competitions and interact with staff of the UCSC Baskin School of Engineering.

Administered by the UCSC Educational Partnership Center (EPC), the new program will run throughout the school year. It is being funded by a \$50,000 grant from the NCCEP/AT&T Foundation. The program will be featured at the school's Back to School Night on September 19 from 6 to 7 p.m., when the EPC will host a Family Math and Science Activities Fair. The school is located at 10301 Seymour Street in Castroville.

The after-school program bolsters the EPC's "Building Bridges to College" effort, an ongoing partnership with several schools in north Monterey County funded 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.

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