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SANTA CRUZ — Eggs rained from the sky outside the Jack Baskin School of Engineering at UC Santa Cruz on Saturday, as 500 students from middle schools and high schools in Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Salinas, Gonzales, Castroville and Soledad competed in the annual MESA Day Preliminary Competition.

After months of building engineering projects according to competition criteria, the students went head to head to find out whose balsawood bridge would withstand the most weight, whose mousetrap car would travel farthest and whose egg would remain intact after falling three stories, among other competitions.

Hosted by MESA, an outreach program created 40 years ago to teach underserved youth about engineering, science and math, Saturday's contest was one of many that will occur statewide during the next few weeks. Regional winners go on to a state competition at Cal Poly, and



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Berenice Hererra and Crystal Olalde of Watsonville High School examine a broken egg inside their egg-drop container. The girls built their container using materials like foam pool floats and hair rollers to help the eggs cradled inside withstand a three-story drop. 'We thought we had improved our model,' Olalde said, when Hererra broke in, laughing. 'But we didn't!' None of their eggs survived the drop.

if successful, move on to a national competition.

"The idea is to get kids exposed to these subjects at a university, so that those who have never even thought about college can see the possibili-

ties of attending one and pursuing a career in engineering or math," said Curt Anderson, UCSC director of communication and partnerships.

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**Rene Siqueiros, Watsonville High School senior**

## MESA

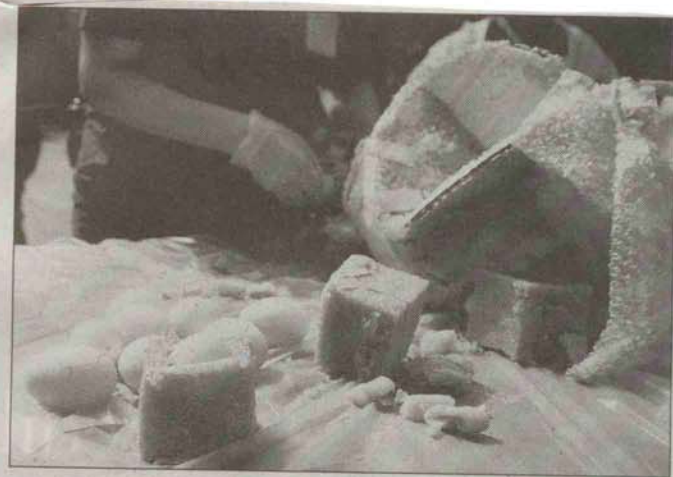
Continued from B1

The 22 MESA programs in California challenged students to pursue a variety of engineering endeavors, including constructing high-flying gliders, creating 3-D model human eyes using computers, building underwater and land robots, and constructing windmills that can power small cars.

"Many kids don't see a connection between math and real life," said Rafael Granados, executive director of Educational Partnership Center and UC College Prep. "We are treating these kids like engineers; they have to meet the criteria and be creative, while working as a team."

Though hands-on projects are fundamental to understanding textbook concepts, according to MESA Director Alexandria Leckliter, the opportunity for the students to work with UCSC undergraduates and real-life engineers, is invaluable.

"A day like today is so important because the kids get to interact with role models," Leckliter said. "They



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Unbroken eggs spill from protective foam casings inside a successfully designed egg-drop container on a judging table at the MESA Day Preliminary Competition at UCSC on Saturday.

get to have lunch with civil engineers, doctors and other industry professionals judging the event."

For Ana Rodarte, a UCSC graduate who volunteered at the competition while in college and now works as the academic coordinator for MESA, the program's impact on personal development is its greatest asset.

"We really get to see the kids grow," Rodarte said. "The transformation that this program creates is amazing."

Rene Siqueiros, a senior at

Watsonville High and a MESA program participant since sixth grade, could not agree more.

"The best part of MESA is getting to actually build, design and test your projects with your peers," said Siqueiros, whose team took first place in the mousetrap car competition and third in the calculus test Saturday. "To be able to apply the things you learn in school and get a firsthand look at engineering — it's an experience you can't get anywhere else."