SANTA CRUZ — About 400 high school and middle school students swarmed at UC Santa Cruz’s engineering building Saturday for a one-day competition designed to inspire them.

The annual MBSA Day competition drew local schools as well as schools from Soledad, Salinas, Pajaro Valley and Monterey school districts for a day filled with math quizzes and hands-on events. Many of the students brought projects and designs that were months in the making, said Alexandria Leckliter, director of the MBSA program, which is short for mathematics, engineering, science achievement.

"They have been working at their home schools on these projects and today is a chance for them to get to test them and see how they compare against their peers," she said.

The projects center around engineering items from ordinary objects. An age-old project was how to create a design that would protect an egg after it was dropped from a certain distance. Another project sought to harness the energy of a mousetrap to move a small vehicle.

"It’s very technical," Leckliter said. "A lot of engineering and a lot of design go into it."

ISSAC HOLGUIN and JESSICA YESS

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