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Language center gets major grant

Mercury News Staff Report

The University of California, Santa Cruz, long a leader in bilingual education studies, has received a \$6.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund a new research center on the education of students who speak little or no English.

At the same time, the UC-Berkeley campus has been given \$4.9 million to continue the work of its national writing center.

University and federal officials announced the grants at a UC Regents meeting Thursday. The two centers are part of a national network of 17 such research centers, with a goal of helping reform American schools and meet national education goals by the year 2000. Among those goals is making American students the best in the world in math and science.

The UC-Santa Cruz project is the only center focused on improving the elementary and secondary education of children whose native tongue is not English. Plans call for academics from five UC campuses to conduct studies in 16 states. Some researchers will look for ways to bridge the cultural gap between students' homes and schools. Others will evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching methods with students of varying ethnic and language backgrounds.

Eugene Garcia, co-director of the new center, said the grant comes at a critical time for education, particularly in California, where 15 percent of the students speak little or no English.