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Summary of Panel Discussion
Symposium 2008

Muskegon Christian School is a PK – 8th grade elementary school located in the City of Muskegon. We serve a diverse group of students with a 25% African – American student body and kids coming from a variety of geographic, denominational, and economic backgrounds.

Our aim with worship renewal was to accomplish three original goals. First, to build strong, positive relationships with local churches, especially an African – American church about 3 blocks away from the school. In addition, we wanted to help students develop meaningful, authentic worship practices. Third, we envisioned honoring the diverse denominational backgrounds and cultural nuances of our diverse student population while helping them understand our unity in Christ in worship.

We used Vertical Habits and the theme “Go Vertical” to frame everything we did at Muskegon Christian School during the grant year. We divided the school year into monthly themes based on the vertical habits. A teacher’s manual was developed that included ideas for each vertical statement with a theme verse, suggested songs, movements, activities, Bible character and additional Bible references. In addition, the manual included a praise service schedule with special speakers, traveling suitcase descriptions and about 40 devotionals centered on worship through the vertical habits. We held a professional development day prior to beginning the school year that outlined the grant, the teacher’s manual and brought teachers through brainstorming exercises that helped them expand vertical habit ideas for their grade level beyond those found in the manual. In addition, art, music, hallway displays and even the school sign all reflected worship throughout the year. Finally, a partnership between the school and Angel Community Church was established by way of an exchange choir that included students from inside the school and the church.

The vertical habits helped us practically in shaping a number of areas. First, we met our primary objectives in a deeper way that we could have imagined at the beginning of the grant process. Stronger relationships were built between the school and Angel Community Church. Interest in and respect of differing worship styles and traditions were celebrated. And students really enjoyed praise services that we connected to everything else they were doing in school and it was easy to see how authentic worship impacted the children. An unexpected place where vertical habits shaped life at MCS was in the curriculum. Many teachers have begun to integrate the principles learned into their subject matter for continued learning.

I believe the greatest value of vertical habits was to help both teachers and staff understand a broader perspective on worship. Students were able to understand that worship is not just praise and thanksgiving, but also lament and asking for help from

God. They understood that worship is relational with their loving Father. In addition, students were exposed to different denominational traditions and made comparisons to them with their own styles of worship. Finally, students and staff alike were impacted in a deep way by being able to speak in a common language about their relationship with Christ. Vertical Habits was the backbone around which worship was expressed throughout the year.

I advise those thinking about preparing a grant or exploring vertical habits to allow worship to be expressed in new, creative and non-traditional ways. Don't be afraid to allow children (and adults) to use their own gifts to express worship in new ways, not just praise service – apply vertical habits to a broader sphere within your community and relationships in creative ways!