

Rap music and science good chemistry for young students

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Rap music and science proved to be the right chemistry for 80 Muskegon-area youths participating in an educational program at Muskegon Community College on Saturday.

"I'm hyped about school," sang rapper Grand Hank, a scientist from Philadelphia. "I'm hyped about school."

"I'm down with school," the students shouted back — "down" in today's slang meaning they're also enthusiastic about education.

The program with Grand Hank was part of a five-week "Hands on Science" workshop for Muskegon-area students in grades 2-6.

Student activities also include field trips, experiments and science lessons, said Janie Brooks, project leader for MCC's "Hands on Science" program. Brooks is also director of continuing education at the college.

"We try to introduce children at a very young age to science," said Brooks. "You could say we're try-

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ing to brainwash them now so that when they get to high school they won't be afraid of science."

Saturday's program was part concert and part science class as students danced in their seats and waved their arms energetically as Grand Hank rapped about the importance of excelling in school. Between songs, he performed science experiments and quizzed students on their knowledge of contributions African-Americans have made to science.

In song he told students that peers who tell them "excelling in school is selling out," are wrong. "Knowledge is power," Grand Hank sang. "If you don't learn, you get burned."

"I liked his message that science is cool and that you can be anything you want to be," said Derecus Pace, a sixth-grader at TriValley Academy.

"It was neat," said Renee Williams, a fourth-grade student at Sacred Heart School. "I like that

he came to us and brought rap music. Some students don't like school, but they like rap music.

Grand Hank's songs also had a message for parents and educators, who are vital to a student's achievement, he said.

"The solution is to teach students to be hungry for knowledge and do it in such a way that they want to go to college," he sang.

Grand Hank, whose real name is Tyraine Ragsdale, travels around the country to promote "educational initiatives to help children excel in school — especially in science." He visited Muskegon Heights Middle School students on Friday.

Formerly a research chemist with Johnson & Johnson, Grand Hank has a chemistry degree from the University of Pittsburgh, and bills himself as a product of Philadelphia's urban public school system.

He uses rap to turn students on to education, science and self-respect, with emphasis on black history.