

# Program rewards students

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Students can earn money just for attending school.

As part of the Challenge Program, founder Daniel Perkins wanted to promote student success.

Perkins, a Johnstown native, became an entrepreneur as a teenager shining shoes.

Now he is the owner, president and CEO of MTS Technologies Inc., with 250 employees and nearly 20 offices around the country.

At a recent student-leadership event, Perkins said the goal of the Challenge Program is to motivate students and help them focus on the importance of hard work.

Barbara Grandinetti, executive director of the Challenge Program, is working with student leaders from the region to organize the Showcase for Commerce that will take place Thursday and Friday at the Cambria County War Memorial.

Students will introduce prominent business leaders during the showcase and they will be able to explore future business opportunities.

About 165 students from Greater Johnstown, Richland, Westmont Hilltop, Hollidaysburg and Shade-Central City school districts and Bishop McCort will attend the showcase.

"This is really a showcase for them, so this year it will be by them," Grandinetti said.

The showcase is organized as a student networking program.

Sangam Sol, a junior at Bishop McCort, attended the showcase last year and said students can benefit from the trip.

"I never knew that there were so many businesses in the area," he said.

Ali Terchanik, a senior at Bishop McCort, said the showcase proved that there are many opportunities for students to come back to after completing college.

Westmont junior Christopher Lee said in addition to the number of businesses he was surprised at the number of products produced in the area.

Throughout the year the Challenge Program works with students from 33 schools and offers about \$100,000 a year to students.

One purpose of the program is to show students that there is a correlation between being good citizens and being good students, Perkins said. That's why he decided the program would award 10th- through 12th-grade students based on best school attendance, community service, highest grade-point average and most improved. Each reward is \$250.

Joe Kimmel, high school principal at Shade, said he has seen student interest within the first year of the program.

"Schools are constantly looking to motivate students," he said. "The incentive program is a natural fit."

Kimmel expects the Challenge Program to continue to grow.

"Anytime you can reward student success it's exciting," he said.

Bryant Wagner, a senior from Greater Johnstown, said the program is the first step to student involvement.

"It gives students a reason to come to school and get involved," he said. "It's a starter, and they can continue on further."