

## **New program offers local students cash awards**

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Holding an after-school job is not the only way Greene County students can earn cash, due to a new program that rewards academic and other achievements.

Challenge Program Inc. of Johnstown has expanded to four Greene County school districts this year. Waynesburg Central, Carmichaels Area, Jefferson-Morgan and Mapletown high schools along with Greene County Career and Technology Center, are participating in the program.

Students in grades 10 through 12 can earn \$250 awards for winning one of four categories: Most improved academically, best attendance, community service and best overall grade-point average. Each participating school will receive a total of \$3,000 in rewards.

The awards will be presented in the spring at ceremonies at each of the participating schools.

"We are excited about the opportunity to work with schools and businesses in Greene County to motivate and reward students," said Dan Perkins, Challenge Program Inc. founder and president and CEO of MTS Technologies in Johnstown.

Local businesses sponsor the schools' involvement in the program, and representatives from those businesses also visit the schools to educate students about the types of jobs they offer.

"That way, it encourages students to train for jobs in their back yard," said Mary Dreliszak, manager for program development for Challenge Program. "These businesses make these awards possible."

Foundation Coal is sponsoring the Career and Technology Center's participation and BAE Systems, a defense contractor from Fayette County, agreed to pay for a half-sponsorship of Carmichaels Area High School.

BAE Systems decided to co-sponsor Carmichaels because many of its employees are from that area, Dreliszak said.

The program still is working on securing sponsorships for the other schools.

Since the program's inception in 2003, checks totaling \$139,000 have been presented to 556 high school students around the region.

"The program makes a positive impact. Grades and attendance have improved in participating schools and students have had the opportunity to gain an understanding of local businesses and employment opportunities," Perkins said in a press release.