

Cold, hard cash for students

■ New program will offer money for those who achieve in four school categories.

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SHARON HILL — Students at Academy Park High School will be getting a new incentive to do well this year: Cold, hard cash.

Top achievers in four different categories will be receiving a no-strings-attached check for \$250, courtesy of the Challenge Program Inc. The program, founded by Johnstown entrepreneur Daniel Perkins, is meant to link students to the business community and encourage them to practice valuable work habits.

"We want to reward success. That's what we're all about and that's what society is all about," Perkins told an auditorium packed with students on Tuesday morning.

The room filled with gasps and chatter as students found out they could earn a significant chunk of change by having the best attendance in their class, the most community service, the most improved grades or the best overall grade point average.

After hearing what the program had to offer, senior Mamyah Kromah's response was, "Wow."

"I think it's great," said the 17-year-old Collingdale resident. "It's easy; anyone could do it."

She added the money will get many students to focus more on school.

That is certainly the hope of Principal Al Johnson, who cast the program as an opportunity for Academy Park to change its image.

"There will be a lot of people watching us to see what we do," he told students. The program, he added, could be a chance for them to make headlines for something other than poor test scores.

It also gives the administration a way to offer more carrots — not just the usual sticks.

"It's applying straightforward business principles to education," Johnson said. "Let's catch our kids doing something good instead of trying to catch them doing something bad."

The program, which is being offered in more than 100 schools this year, will hand out around \$300,000 to students in



Times staff / PETER A. ZINNER

Daniel Perkins, founder of the Challenge Program, interacts with students at Academy Park High School on Tuesday. The Challenge Program will offer monetary rewards for students who excel at Academy Park.

Pennsylvania and Delaware. Academy Park is the first school in eastern Pennsylvania to host the program.

Perkins said, based on anecdotal evidence, the program has had "phenomenal" success. It's still being evaluated for the actual impact on factors like grades and attendance, he said.

U.S. Rep. Joe Sestak, D-7 of Edgmont, also helped usher in the program Tuesday by telling students about his experiences in

the Navy and the importance of education.

"The future of this America is based on education," Sestak said. "We need you."

The morning concluded with students getting a taste of rewards to come. Dozens of hands shot in the air to answer each question in a short quiz given by Perkins, who handed out \$5 bills for correct answers.

"Bottom line is, if you do a good job, we will reward you," he said.