

Challenge Program motivates students

Michael Cominos, principal of Ford City Junior-Senior High School in Armstrong County, identifies The Challenge Program Inc. as a "beginning block" that can be used to change students' study habits and behaviors.

The program provides financial incentives to students for achievement in four areas - community service, grade point average, academic improvement and attendance - in the sophomore, junior and senior grade levels.

Cominos, who has served as an administrator since 1999 and principal at Ford City for two years, noted that in his opinion, TCP is particularly beneficial for students striving to win the Most Improved Award.

"(TCP) is that one little push that may help to change someone's behavior," he said. "Continual improvement and competition go hand-in-hand."

Cominos believes that personal growth will be crucial for his students in the future as they compete for employment

in an increasingly global work force.

"Students will continue to have the challenge of competing against the best and brightest from around the world as opposed to a regional competitive market place," he said.

"The Challenge Program Inc. is one good indicator of improvement in performance."

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**MICHAEL COMINOS,
PRINCIPAL,
FORD CITY
JUNIOR-SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL**

As testament to the program's effectiveness, Cominos described the change he saw in some of his students.

"Some of my struggling students tended to want to battle for the Most Improved Award," he said. "For a few students, it (winning) was their sole goal."

"One senior girl came into my office last year for a disciplinary problem and asked me how much this was going to



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affect her chances of winning the Most Improved Award. It was always in the back of her mind."

Cominos admitted that financial incentives may be what originally attract students to the program, but he said the ultimate reward for students is more than just a cash prize.

"Students get excited to be recognized," he said. "It (cash) is an excellent extrinsic motivator with the added potential benefit of creating a change in a student's behavior for the better."

For the senior girl who won the Most Improved Award at Ford City last year, Cominos said the program has done just that.

"She was pumped when she did get it (the award)," he said. "It probably helped her graduate in the long run."

Kayla Washko writes for The Challenge Program Inc., a non-profit organization headquartered in Johnstown whose dual mission is to award students with financial incentives for successes they achieve while still in school and to build a bridge between high schools and the local business community.