

Program offers opportunity to all students

For high schools participating in The Challenge Program Inc., the new school year means a fresh opportunity for students to be considered for one of the program's awards.

Representatives from The Challenge Program and the business community will hold orientation assemblies at high schools throughout the fall months to introduce the program and its four categories: Best Attendance, Most Improved, Most Community Service and Best GPA.

Bill Marshall, principal of Penn Cambria High School, said the program is unique in

that it does not place restrictions on eligibility.

"The thing I like about The Challenge Program Inc. is that I can stand before my students at the beginning of the year and say that every kid has a chance to win," Marshall said.

"There are no stipulations on the perfect attendance award, for example, that say a student also has to meet a certain QPA."

At the beginning of the school year, educators grant students a "clean slate" for Challenge Program award eligibility, meaning that only service hours, attendance



KAYLA WASHKO
The Challenge Program Inc.

records and grade point averages from the current school year are used to select winners.

Marshall said this kind of criteria makes the competition exciting for students

because they know their individual performances are what make them eligible for the awards.

"We know it (the program) works," said Marshall. "I have kids who come in late or call in absent because of a funeral, and they ask me if that will affect their eligibility of winning perfect attendance. It stays with them."

Marshall noted that during the 2007-2008 school year, three students had perfect attendance at Penn Cambria.

During the 2008-2009 school year, he saw that number jump to 19.

He added that community

members have told him about an increase they saw in student volunteerism once Penn Cambria began participating in The Challenge Program.

"They say community service has increased 100 percent," he said. "Before The Challenge Program Inc., students only did community service to be considered for National Honor Society. Now they're doing it to be considered for one of these awards."

For Marshall, the best part of the program is the excitement it generates among students at the spring awards assembly.

"We have kids sitting in the

auditorium who have never won an award since they started elementary school, and they now have a chance to win something," he said.

"As a principal, there's no greater motivating factor than that."

The Challenge Program Awards at Penn Cambria High School are sponsored by Wilkinson Bus Lines.

The Challenge Program Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose dual mission is to provide high school students with financial incentives for success and to build business-education partnerships.