

Sparking student advancement in Westmont

Susan Anderson, superintendent of Westmont Hilltop School District, believes that the local community's interest in student advancement is the best part of The Challenge Program Inc.

"The community is involved, interested and affirming of students' efforts," Anderson said.

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

Besides the financial incentives, Anderson believes the

support of the community also influences students to volunteer their time.

"There is definitely a motivational effect that comes from a community that recognizes and appreciates the character and efforts of our students," she said.

Westmont has been involved with The Challenge Program since the 2004-2005 school year.

Anderson has served as superintendent for the past seven years at Westmont Hilltop, and has also worked as a teacher and principal.

She noted that she has witnessed a definite change in stu-



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The Challenge Program

dents competing to win one of the four awards.

"When students are challenged with constructive goals, such as improved attendance and achievement, and opportunities for community service,"

she said, "there are always positive changes."

Anderson said that Westmont students are choosing to volunteer their time in many different ways throughout the community.

"Community service is a priority in our district, as evidenced through Student Council, Key Club and a multitude of senior projects," she said. "Students focus on service by choice."

Anderson said another advantage of The Challenge Program is its goal to connect students with local businesses and prepare them for the future.

"Each of the four award categories will one day help students in the work force or in postsecondary studies," she said.

As a member of The Challenge Program's Educational Advisory Board, Anderson also is working to create a pilot program in which more students will have chances to win awards.

"The student with the highest GPA is recognized in numerous ways by the school system," Anderson said. "However, others who are within a few points may not receive recognition."

The new program would create an equal chance for all stu-

dents in the top 10 percent of their grades to win the Academic Achievement award.

"We are interested in whether this pilot will be motivational to more students by offering increased opportunities for such acknowledgement," she said.

The Challenge Program awards at Westmont Hilltop High School are sponsored by Concurrent Technologies Corp.

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.