

A Band Parent's Guide to Competition

Texas is blessed with a tremendously strong curricular music program in the public school systems. For whatever reasons, our music programs have survived every curricular innovation, every scheduling impediment, and every budgetary crisis in the last 75 years. A large part of this longevity may be attributed to the well-organized and maintained competition system in Texas that is the model for the rest of the country. Band competition in Texas is sponsored by two very different organizations: the University Interscholastic League (UIL) and the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA). The Association of Texas Small School Bands is an organization similar to TMEA, but is for 1A, 2A and 3A schools. The UIL is an organization of schools. Schools may elect to be a part of the UIL each year and nearly all of the Texas public school systems choose to do so. TMEA is an organization of music teachers (including band, choir, orchestra, classroom music teachers, and private lesson teachers) who teaching students in grades Kindergarten through college. Marching and concert competitions are sponsored by the UIL, while TMEA and ATSSB (Association of Texas Small School Bands) sponsors the competition that chooses the All-State performers each year and, in biennial cycles, selects the Honor Bands in each class through recordings that may or may not be from UIL competitions.

UIL Marching Contest

Region Level

This contest has been sponsored by the UIL for over half a century and takes place in the 24 different designated regions in the state in October each year. Bands march shows of no less than 5 minutes and no more than 8 minutes to be given a rating by each of three independent judges: 1=superior; 2=excellent; 3=good; 4=fair; 5=poor. The judges cannot confer about their ratings and the FINAL rating is a consensus of the three NOT an average. For instance, a I, I, V is a ONE. A V, V, I is a FIVE, etc. Theoretically, EVERY band can get a I=superior or a V= poor. The competition is NOT among the bands themselves but against a standard of excellence that has been established through the many decades of this competition. This contest was the primary competitive goal of Texas bands until 1979 when the State Marching Contest was founded. It is still the first of three parts of a "Sweepstakes" which includes Marching, Concert, and Sightreading.

Area Level

This contest is held every two years in the "even" numbered years. Its sole purpose is to choose the State Qualifiers from the regions within our area: 1, 2, 16, and 24. One band per 5 entered will advance to the State Marching Contest. The contest uses 5 judges: 3 music judges and 2 marching judges. Each judge ranks the bands from top to bottom and the total ranks are added for a "rank total." The lowest rank total is first place!

State Level

The contest has been held since 1979 to choose a State Champion in each class. It is now held every two years in even numbered years and has been moved to the Alamodome in San Antonio to prevent weather interruptions. The contest is similar to the Area Contest with five judges and the lowest total of "rank points" becomes first place.

UIL Concert and Sight-reading Contest

This is the staple competition for UIL, occurring every year in the spring in all 24 regions of the state. Bands prepare a concert program of three pieces chosen from the Prescribed Music List and perform for a panel of three judges who rate the bands with one of five ratings, just as in regional marching

competition. Again, the comparison is only with a standard of excellence, not with other bands in the contest. Theoretically, every band could earn a First Division or a Fifth Division! Immediately following the concert, bands move to another room to sight-read a piece of music chosen to be read by all the bands within a class statewide! The music for sight-reading is composed specifically for the contest and addresses certain fundamentals that are aligned with the curriculum for each classification. This is the musical equivalent of a statewide achievement test for Band.

Solo and Ensemble Contest

Solo and Ensemble Contest is an "individual" competition that is usually held in February of each year. Students choose a solo and/or an ensemble and begin preparation in November/December. Once again, judges are rating each performance compared to a statewide scale of excellence, not as a comparison of one student to another. A judge will listen to the performance, write comment to the performer(s) and assign a rating (1=superior; 2=excellent; 3=good; 4=fair; 5=poor) based on the preparation and performance. Students earn medals for receiving a First Division rating (1) from the judge.

All-Region/Area/State Band Auditions (TMEA)

The Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) and The Association of Texas Small School Bands (ATSSB) sponsor individual competitions every fall that culminate in the selection of the All-State Bands, Choirs, and Orchestras that perform at the annual convention held in San Antonio, TX in February. The 28 Texas regions hold the first level of competition and the top students advance to the Area level held in January. In each of the seven Areas, a designated number of the top students are selected to All-State. At each level of competition, students perform for a panel of 5 judges in a blind audition where judges are screened from sight and do not know which students are performing. Just as in other head-to-head competitions in Texas, each judge ranks each student in comparison with each other and the lowest total of rank points is first chair! The All-Region Bands perform in a concert in the middle of January each year, but the Area Band is for qualification purposes only. The All-State groups rehearse for 3 days in February prior to their performances with internationally acclaimed conductors and educators!