

A 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 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, and classroom music teachers at every level through college.

Marching and concert competitions are sponsored by the UIL, while TMEA 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

Regional level:

This contest has been sponsored by the UIL for over half a century and takes place in the 28 different designated regions in the state in October each year. Band's 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: 20, 5, 7, 2, 3, 24, and 25. One band per 5 entered will advance to State. 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/SIGHTREADING CONTEST

This is the staple competition for UIL, occurring every year in the spring in all 28 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 sightread a piece of music chosen to be read by all the bands within a class statewide! The music for sightreading 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.

UIL SOLO-ENSEMBLE CONTEST

The only "individual" competition that the UIL sponsors for instrumentalists is held in the Winter, usually at the end of February each year. Students choose a solo and/or an ensemble from the Prescribed Music List for their instrument and begin work in November/December. Solos may be memorized so that students can earn advancement to the State level by making a First Division at the region level. Non-memorized solos cannot advance. Once again, judges are rating each performance compared to a statewide scale of excellence, not as a comparison of one student to another. Students earn medals for First Divisions as well as qualification to State.

The Texas State Solo-Ensemble Contest is held in Austin each year during the last weekend in May. Students who compete perform for judges with national and international experience, often major symphony performers and college educators. Students who earn a First Division receive a state gold medal and a few students are selected to be "Outstanding Performers" and receive State Champion medals for their work. Nearly 20,000 students participate in this two-day event.

TMEA ALL-REGION/AREA/STATE

The Texas Music Educators Association sponsors individual competitions every fall that culminate in the selection of the All-State Bands, Choirs, and Orchestras that perform at the annual convention 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!

TMEA STATE HONOR BAND

TMEA also sponsors competition every two years in the "odd" numbered years for concert bands to be named "State Honor Band." Bands across the state choose to record as many as five different performances of their concert programs and submit the best of these for consideration at the region, area, and state levels. At each level, a panel of five adjudicators hears the recorded performances without knowing the school identification. The judges rank the performances from top to bottom and the top 2 at each level advance to the next level. The performance with the lowest total rank points is first place at each level. Fourteen performances are heard at the final level to select the finalists and the State Honor Band in each class.

(borrowed with permission from the Duncanville band programs and their web site)