

O'CONNOR 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). "Marching Festivals" get us ready for UIL. The UIL is an organization of schools. Schools may elect to be a part of the UIL each year and nearly all Texas public schools 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 band 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 a half century and takes in the 33 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 1, 1, 5 is a ONE. A 5, 5, 1 is a FIVE, etc. Theoretically, EVERY band can get 1=superior or a 5=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.

Interesting note: The O'Connor HS Marching Band holds 19 consecutive Superior (I) ratings in UIL regional marching competition and 18 consecutive Sweepstakes Awards!!

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: 32, 29, & 11. 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 ranks are added for a “rank total”. The lowest rank total is first place!

Interesting note: The O’Connor HS Marching Band has qualified for the AREA Finals since 2006 (finishing in the top 5 since 2008) and has qualified for the State Marching Contest every year since 2008. The O’Connor HS Marching Band was the AREA G Champion in 2014 winning both prelims and finals to qualify for state.

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 “ranks points” becomes first place.

Interesting note: The O’Connor HS Marching Band has qualified for the UIL Texas State Marching Contest in 2008, 2010, 2012 & 2014!!

UIL CONCERT/SIGHTREADING CONTEST

This is the staple competition for UIL, occurring every year in the spring in all now 33 regions of the state. Bands prepare a concert program of three pieces from a 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 curriculum for each classification. This is the musical equivalent of a statewide achievement test for Band.

Interesting note: The O’Connor HS Symphonic Winds, Symphonic Band, Concert Band, & Freshman Band, annually earn consistent 1st divisions at both Concert and SR Contest. The Symphonic Winds has never earned less than a 1st Division at any contest, UIL or Invitational in 19 years!!

UIL SOLO AND 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 ensemble from a Prescribed Music List for their instrument and begin work in November/December. Solos

must 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 a comparison of one student to another. Students earn medals for First Divisions as well as qualification to State. The Texas State Solo and 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.

Interesting note: OC Band students earn hundreds of 1st Divisions annually and in 2016 two of our percussion students were named Outstanding Performers at UIL State!!

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 TMEA convention in February.

The now 33 Texas regions hold the first level of competition and the top students advance to the Area level held in January. In each of the new Areas, a designated 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 rehears for 3 days in February prior to their performances with internationally acclaimed conductors and educators!

Interesting note: Placement in Texas All-State is indicative of being ranked in the top ½ % of all music students in Texas and the top 2 % nationwide! The past OC All State students are honored in our band hallways with two hanging frames listing the year they made All-State. Annually OC band students earn the highest % of chairs in the Region Jazz & Band since the school opened!

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 four different performances of their concert programs and submit the best of these for

consideration but 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 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.

Interesting note: The O'Connor Symphonic Winds were the Region 11 Honor Band winner in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2016! They were Area Finalists those same years.

GREAT BANDS AREN'T AFRAID TO COMPETE! It is a philosophy we live by. If you have to compete...compete to win. They know that competition keeps them sharp and prepares them for life. They know that competition represents only a moment in the process and that competition doesn't replace the process!

"Without some goal and some effort to reach it, no man can live."

-Fyodor Dostoevsky

Respectfully,

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