

A Parent's Guide to Evaluation & 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 evaluation & competition system in Texas that is the model for the rest of the country. Band evaluation & competition in Texas is sponsored by three different organizations: the University Interscholastic League (UIL), the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA), and the Association of Texas Small School Bands (ATSSB). 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. ATSSB is an organization of band directors specifically for bands in Classes 1A through 4A, and the middle schools that feed into them. Marching and concert evaluations & contests are sponsored by the UIL, while TMEA & ATSSB sponsors the All-State performers each year and, in biennial cycles, selects the Honor Bands and Outstanding Performance Series winners in each class through recordings that may or may not be from UIL evaluations.

UIL MARCHING EVALUATIONS & CONTESTS

Region Marching Evaluation:

This evaluation has been sponsored by the UIL for over 50 years and takes place 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: Division 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 1st division; a I, V, V is a 5th division, etc. Theoretically, *every* band can earn a first division, or a fifth division, or anything in between. The bands are evaluated against a standard of excellence that has been established through the many decades of this event. This rating was the primary 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 Eldorado Mighty Eagle Band has earned a Division 1 rating at the UIL Region Marching Evaluation 39 times, including a streak of 26 consecutive Division 1 ratings, and 31 in the last 32 years!

Area Marching Contest:

This contest is held every two years in the “odd” numbered years. Its sole purpose is to choose the State Qualifiers from the regions within our area: 1, 6, 16, 22. Bands must earn a Division 1 rating at the Region evaluation in order to qualify for the Area 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. The top three scoring bands automatically qualify for the State contest. Depending on the number of bands performing at the Area contest, up to an additional two bands may also qualify.

Interesting note: The Eldorado Mighty Eagle Band has qualified for the State Marching Contest four times!

State Marching Contest:

This contest has been held since 1979 to choose a State Champion in each class. It is now held every two years in odd 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.

Interesting note: The four times the Eldorado Mighty Eagle Band has qualified for the State Marching Contest include a Fifth Place finish in 1989, and Third Place finish in 1999!

UIL CONCERT & SIGHTREADING EVALUATION

This is the staple evaluation for UIL, occurring every year in the spring in all 33 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 region marching evaluation. Again, the comparison is only with a standard of excellence, not with other bands in the evaluation. 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 in the same class statewide! The music for sightreading is composed specifically for the evaluation and addresses certain fundamentals that are aligned with the curriculum for each class. This is the musical equivalent of a statewide achievement test for band. These evaluations make up the final two parts of the “Sweepstakes” award. In order to earn a Sweepstakes, a band must earn First Division Ratings in marching, concert, and sightreading during the same school year.

Interesting note: The Eldorado Mighty Eagle Band has earned the Sweepstakes award 28 times!

UIL SOLO & ENSEMBLE EVALUATION

The only “individual” evaluation that UIL sponsors for instrumentalists is held in the winter, usually in early February each year. Students choose a solo and/or ensemble from the Prescribed Music List for their instrument and begin work in November. Solos must be memorized in order to qualify for the State level by earning a First Division at the region level. 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 Evaluation 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 three-day event.

Interesting note: The UIL gave a State Sweepstakes Award to the school in each class with the most gold & silver medals at this event for many years. The Eldorado Mighty Eagle Band won the State Sweepstakes Award in 1992! This award is no longer given.

ATSSB ALL-REGION/AREA/STATE

The Association of Texas Small School Bands sponsors individual competitions every fall that culminate in the selection of the All-State Bands that perform at the annual TMEA convention in February. The 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 five 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 three days in February prior to their performances with internationally acclaimed conductors and educators!

Interesting note: Placement in the Texas All-State Bands is indicative of being ranked in the top 0.5% of all music students in Texas and the top 2% nationwide!

HONOR BAND / OPS

TMEA also sponsors competition every two years in the “even” 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 with the lowest total rank points being first place at each level. Fourteen performances are heard at the State level to select the State Honor Band in each class. The band named as that year’s Honor Band performs at the TMEA All-State Clinic & Convention the following February in San Antonio. ATSSB also sponsors a similar competition annually call the “Outstanding Performance Series”. The contest format is similar to the one used for Honor Band. The OPS State Winners are placed on a CD for distribution among all Texas bands.

Interesting note: The Eldorado Mighty Eagle Band was ranked 6th Place for Class 1A in 1974, was the State Runner-Up in Honor Band competition for Class 2A in 1992, and 6th Place for Class 2A in 1998! The Mighty Eagle Band finished in 6th Place at the State OPS Contest in 2017!