

Parents Introduction to Marching Band Competitions

(Updated for 2006-2007 school year)

Hopefully this document will help answer most of the questions you may have about marching band competitions.

This document only talks about “the band.” What about the color guard?

In marching band competitions the color guard (or “auxiliary”) is considered to be an integral part of the band just like any other section (trumpets, flutes, etc.) For purposes of this document “the band” refers to students playing marching instruments, “pit” instruments, or participating in color guard.

A Typical Marching Band Competition Day

Typically the band will rehearse in the morning. Sometimes, rehearsal will start at 9:00 AM (as usual). Sometimes, rehearsal will start late, or the band will have an extended lunch period before boarding the bus to travel to the competition. The exact schedule depends on what parts of the program the band needs to work on, travel time to the event, and even when the band is scheduled to perform during the event.

The final schedule for each competition day will be distributed a few days before the competition. It will also be posted on our website – usually along with a map to the competition site. For planning purposes, students should expect a marching band competition to be an all-day commitment which will last until late in the evening.

Parents who just want to attend the competition do not need to follow the student schedule. They should plan to arrive at the competition site **at least** an hour before the band is scheduled to ensure adequate time to find parking, walk to the stadium, pay admission, and find their seat before the band competes. Spectators are asked not to enter the stadium during a band performance. If you arrive while a band is performing you should wait until a break before finding your seat. At many competitions there will be ushers who will indicate when to wait, and when you may enter the stands.

We strongly recommend that parents plan their time at the competition so they can observe as many bands as possible – not just our band. Some of the other bands will not be as good as ours. Some will be much better. Some of the performances may be boring. Many will be outstanding and inspiring.

What does the band do during all that time?

Over 150 Santa Teresa students, parents, and staff are involved when we participate in a marching band competition. Travel time varies. After arrival at the competition site it typically takes about two hours to set up, assemble instruments, get in uniform, and warm up. Warm up activities occur away from the stadium, to minimize interference with bands that are performing at the same time.

A typical marching band competition involves more than a dozen bands. The events are typically spread out over a large site (most competition sites are larger than the Santa Teresa site). A lot of people and equipment must be moved over fairly large distances through crowded areas.

Transportation

Students always travel TO marching band competitions as a group. Exceptions to this rule, if any, would be extremely rare. Preparation and transport to these events is already hectic enough, and dealing with even one late or lost student could completely devastate the event for the rest of the band. Sometimes there are last minute changes which are discussed during the ride to the show. Sometimes the order or scheduled performance times change. This makes it essential for the students to travel and arrive at the event together.

Students are allowed to return home with parents (and only parents) if they have a signed "Leaving with Parents" form and they sign out with the Band Director before leaving. Last minute decisions (e.g., no form) or forgetting to sign out cause HUGE problems - a couple of years ago our departure from a competition was significantly delayed while we searched for a "lost" student who had forgotten to sign out. This resulted in additional bus costs, and made an already late return to ST even later.

Parents are encouraged to carpool to these events. This provides a natural way to meet other band parents, and many lasting friendships between parents have resulted from carpooling or volunteering at band events.

Finding Your Student

Finding and visiting your student at a marching band competition can be very challenging. Cell phones can help, but there is no guarantee your phone will work in some locations, and often it's too noisy for you (or your student) to hear the phone anyway. Having an advance plan can help.

Parents are allowed in the band staging area, which can be almost as amazing as the competition itself. Finding the staging area for our band may be a challenge. At some competitions it may be more than a half mile from the stadium. STMAA Hospitality Committee volunteers will sometimes be available near the gate where you pay for admission or in the stands to help direct interested parents to the band staging area. If you go to where the bands register upon arrival they can usually direct you to the staging area for our band, where you will find the buses, truck, and food service equipment we bring to the competition. You may not find the band there. Before the performance they will likely be practicing at some far-off part of the site. After the performance they will return to the staging area to change out of uniforms and eat dinner. After dinner they will return to the stadium to watch other bands perform and wait for the awards ceremony. The schedule for each competition varies. As our band has grown, we tend to compete later in the show schedule. This often necessitates eating dinner before we compete.

Finding Other Parents

Finding other Santa Teresa parents is much easier than finding your own student. STMAA Hospitality Committee volunteers will hang out near the stadium entrance (where you pay for admission) and in the stands. They have prepared name tags for every band parent on our roster, and will be distributing these at the event. If they do not have a name tag for you they will give you a "temporary" name tag and will prepare a permanent one in time for the next competition. Please remember to turn in your

name tag when you leave the event so they can be stored all together and brought to the next event by our volunteers.

Where to sit

At most competitions, parents and spectators (paying customers) will sit on the “front” side of the stadium. This is the side with the press box where the “home” crowd would sit. Performers (our students) are usually required to sit on the “back” side of the stadium, where the “visitor” crowd would sit. Parents are allowed to sit with band members on the back side of the stadium. Occasionally, the front side of the stadium is so crowded that the back side is also used for overflow customer seating.

Food

Mobile catering for 150 people is not an easy undertaking. It's difficult to please everyone, every time, but we do try. We will try to accommodate special dietary needs for religious reasons or in the case of food allergies, but **it is very important that you make special needs known well in advance.**

This year we are fortunate to have Kerry Johnson leading our catering crew, but we will need assistance from every band family to make this a successful season. Your band fees pay for the food for your student, but we need help with preparing, transporting, serving, and clean up at every competition.

Arrangements for feeding volunteers who are working at the competition will be announced at a later date, but please be aware that we are usually not in a position to feed spectators without prior approval. Local band booster organizations at the competition event site usually operate food concession stands for spectators, and we encourage you to support them. They are dedicated band parents working hard to raise money to support their students - just like us.

We do provide water to all students, staff, and event volunteers at each competition.

Please contact any STMAA board member or send email to questions@600building.com if you have questions.

Weather

Inclement weather does not automatically cancel a marching band competition. In most cases the competition will continue even if it is raining. We strongly recommend you bring additional clothing to deal with both cold and wet conditions. Competitions are at night. It gets cold, and sometimes it gets very wet. Most stadiums have metal seating which will suck every trace of heat from your body if you don't also bring something soft and insulated to sit on.

Please do not use an umbrella in the stands during the competition. It blocks the views of other spectators who are sitting in the rain with you..

What To Bring With You

1. Money. For admission to the competition, and for purchasing food or beverages. Admission is typically \$10-\$15 for adults, sometimes less for children. (Performers do not pay, but support staff and volunteers usually do have to pay.
2. Warm clothes
3. Wet weather gear (chant in unison "Gore-Tex is my friend, Gore-Tex is my friend, ...")
4. More warm clothes
5. Warm blanket to put over you
6. Another warm blanket to sit on
7. Water to drink
8. A chair to sit on if you plan to hang around in the parking lot before/after the competition. Please do not plan to bring chairs into the stadium – space in the stands is usually at a premium. "Stadium seats" are usually OK, but each venue sets it's own policy.

Competition Schedule

There are usually around 16 bands at a competition. The bands are assigned to classes based on the size of the band. Most (but not all) of our competitions are in a circuit run by the Western Band Association (WBA).

There are five classes of bands in WBA field competition. Classification of each band is based on TOTAL number of performers (drum majors, musicians and auxiliary) as follows:

- ◆ Class 5A: Any number of members
- ◆ Class 4A: Bands with membership no greater than 140
- ◆ Class 3A: Bands with membership no greater than 100
- ◆ Class 2A: Bands with membership no greater than 80
- ◆ Class 1A: Bands with membership no greater than 60
- ◆ Judged Exhibition: Bands new to field competition that wish to participate without competing.

The schedule at a given competition usually starts with the smallest class (1A) and moves up toward the largest class (5A). After the final band performs there is a break for score calculation. Then the awards ceremony begins.

Our band is in class 4A, which means that we will tend to compete later in the evening. We will usually know our approximate performance time (sometimes called "step off time") in advance, but schedules can and do change during the competition. Planning to arrive "just in time" to hear our band play is a very risky strategy. The starting time varies for each competition. Typically the first band will perform around 5:00 PM or 6:00 PM. Awards ceremonies typically end around 10:00 PM and occasionally around 11:00 PM

How Does Judging Work?

Judging is impossible to explain in the space allotted here. Compete details can be found at <http://www.westernband.info> Look under "Policies/Rules", for "Contest Rules".

We will try to produce a summary of how judging works and make it available before the first competition of the season.

What Is The “PIT” Crew?

Most of the band plays their instruments while marching. The portion of the band playing stationary instruments (tympani, marimba, gong, chimes, cymbals, keyboard, etc.) at the front of the band is called the “pit”. The “pit crew” is a team of parents responsible for helping the pit musicians move this equipment on and off the field within a strict time limit.

Heading Home

After the awards ceremony students return to the staging area to load the buses for the return trip home. Any remaining items (instruments, equipment, and food service items) need to be loaded onto the truck before we leave.

Once the buses and truck return to the school a number of items must be unloaded and put away. Sometimes, the crush of students attempting to retrieve their instruments from the truck interferes with unloading the truck, causing an unnecessary delay for everyone. If your student is waiting for something to come off the truck please be patient, and encourage them to help unload and put things away. By the end of a long marching band competition day we are all very tired and anxious to go home.

Some of our school neighbors are very sensitive to noise coming from the school. Please remember that “reasonable” noise in the afternoon or early evening hours may be quite unreasonable at midnight. Please remind your students to keep noise to a minimum if we arrive back at the school late.

Students will have the opportunity to call home when we arrive at the school (usually before we arrive at the school). At least one adult will remain at the school until all students have been picked up. Students should not plan to walk home.

More Questions?

We hope this document is useful to you. Additional questions or comments about this document should be directed to questions@600building.com or Jon Reinke at 408-224-5532.