**Philosophies of Competition and Non-competition**

To be or not to be competitive…

One of the most important decisions a band director must make is whether to compete or not. As was stated in the previous section, the marching band director new to a school should obviously maintain the type of band he/she inherits and decide if, how and when to change. It is very important to have a philosophy in writing for either competition or non-competition. It is important to periodically *communicate* this viewpoint to the students, parents and administration. A good argument can be made for either case, depending on the school situation and the personal philosophies of the band director.

**A sample case for competition**

Although there are pros and cons to competing, we feel the positive values far outweigh the negatives. We choose to compete in marching band because we feel it is the best motivator for you to excel as individuals and as a group. Our band's motto is "Be Your Best." We strive to achieve this every day and not just in show performances. However, we all tend to prepare better when we know there is a performance approaching, and a competition focuses this even more than a football halftime show or other performance. It is the same with academics—we all tend to study and learn more if there is a test than no test.

I think there is competitiveness **in human nature** that can be either good or bad. When friends get together and shoot baskets, it is not long before they are playing a game. When people go bowling or play a card game, they soon start keeping score because that is part of “playing the game.” Band competitions should be *treated as a game* with no more or less emphasis put on it. When used as an enjoyable activity and means to achieving other goals, it can be very rewarding.

We treat competitions as a test or exam and use **the score** as a measurement of our success and improvement from show to show. Of course, there are always variations in scoring since it is a human activity. We will tell you if we think the score was accurate or perhaps too high or low for the particular point in the season. Just like in school, our goal is to achieve 100 points. In band there is no perfect score, but our approach is to *strive for* excellence and perfection. If your goals are to be just pretty good, it is too easily achieved. Since scores start low and improve as the season progresses, we use the score as a benchmark compared to previous contests or seasons. We set goals such as “we hope to break a score of 80” by a certain time in the season. If we reach that score, and we think it is accurate, we have achieved a goal or plateau for the week.

When we rehearse, perform and compete, **we only have control of ourselves**—how well we practice, how well the show works and is written and how close we come to *achieving our potential*. We do not have any control over what other bands show up at the contest and how well they are achieving their goals. Other than doing our best, we have no control over how the judges evaluate us. Our desire is to compete in great stadiums and where great bands are competing whenever possible. We want you to be challenged in rehearsing and want you to see the great bands of our activity.

We try to define the terms **winning and losing** in other than placement terms but in life skills terms. We have all seen first place groups that acted like losers and last place groups that were really winners in their behavior and attitude. We expect you to react the same regardless of what place the band receives—congratulate others and be humble if complimented. Human nature being what it is, we all prefer to place higher rather than lower and *that is okay*. The marching band competition scene should be viewed as part of the educational process of our band program. It opens up many opportunities for learning that cannot be duplicated elsewhere.

**A sample case for non-competition**

Our high school marching band has developed into a “Performance Band” as opposed to other schools who have “Competition Bands.” Our philosophy is that *cooperation* is a goal of our music program as opposed to competition. The marching band still focuses on quality performances but concentrates on parades, football games and other community events.

We perform music that is enjoyable and accessible to the average fan in the stands as opposed to esoteric music that many competition bands perform. The students prepare 3-5 shows each season and enjoy the style and variety.

Competition in marching band tends to concentrate on beating the other bands rather than focusing on one’s own performance. In band and in society in general, the need to be “Number One” has gotten out of hand and overshadows important values. In our band we strive for cooperation, self-discipline, commitment, leadership and responsibility. All of these qualities are achievable in the Performance Band model.

We believe in performing music for its intrinsic values—learning for its own reward, especially in the field of music education. The extrinsic values—awards and placements—are shallow in a contest and do not have long lasting worth. Being in a Performance Band allows the members to concentrate on their performance and not worry about the judges, awards and contest results. The satisfaction comes from an outstanding performance, achieving *your* best results and not being *the* best.

Because of the focus on local performances, there is a reduced time commitment in the summer. Band Camp is the first summer practice and is held two weeks before school begins. The next week involves morning practices only.

There is also a reduced expense involved with the marching band program and therefore the band fees are about half of what a competition band’s fees are. The Band Boosters can reduce the number of fundraisers and the workload involved with them.

Finally and most important, the Concert Band truly becomes the focus of the total band program. More time can be devoted to Concert Band practice in the fall and a late fall concert is scheduled each year. Music sight reading skills are improved because of the greater number of music arrangements performed by the marching band.

The Performance Band is a Win-Win situation for the band members, director, parents and community.