

United ISD Band Programs

Achieving Success in a Multicultural Environment

Javier J. Vera

Laredo, Texas is located along the border between the United States and Mexico. The people of this community uniquely represent the history that makes Laredo distinguishable among other cities of similar sizes and populations. There are two prominent school districts in this city, the Laredo Independent School District, and the United Independent School District, which both have strong band programs. The latter of the two, UISD, is presently one of the fastest growing school districts in Texas. It is this district's band program and its development, which will be the focus of this article.

UISD first gained national attention in the fall of 1963, when United Junior/Senior High School, the first underground school in the nation, opened with grades six through eleven. The underground classrooms were designed to double as community shelters in the event of an atomic war and served as a model for over 300 schools across the nation. The underground classrooms were more economical to heat and cool. Nationally acclaimed, the school received a citation from the Department of Defense.

UISD again made headlines in June of 1964. At that time, state law prohibited students from speaking Spanish at school. Members of the UISD Board of Trustees and the administration met with Texas Education Agency (TEA) officials and professors of the Foreign Language Department at the University of Texas to design and implement a pioneer bilingual program in the first grade. UISD was one of the first districts in the nation to teach Spanish speakers English and English speakers Spanish. Also, for the first time, Texas students were permitted to use their native language on the school grounds and in the classroom. During the many years that followed, UISD opened numerous schools to accommodate student growth. The school district experienced its only drop in enrollment at the beginning of the 1973-74 school year when the Laredo Air Force Base closed in April of 1973.

The UISD Band program had its inception in 1963 when Raymond Bostick, a band director from Pearsall, came to take the position of the first band director for United High School which had grades 6-11. At that time, music classes were being taught, but a band program did not exist. That year, Mr. Bostick created the first beginner band classes in the district. As early as 1965, the first bands from United High School, began entering UIL contests as a composite group B high school with grades 8-11. Over a period of the

next ten years, the United Bands competed in UIL Classifications from 1B, 1A, 2A, and 3A categories. The United Bands became known for having excellent musicians and outstanding musical performances in both marching and concert contests.

With the growth of the city, UISD which started with three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school has now grown to

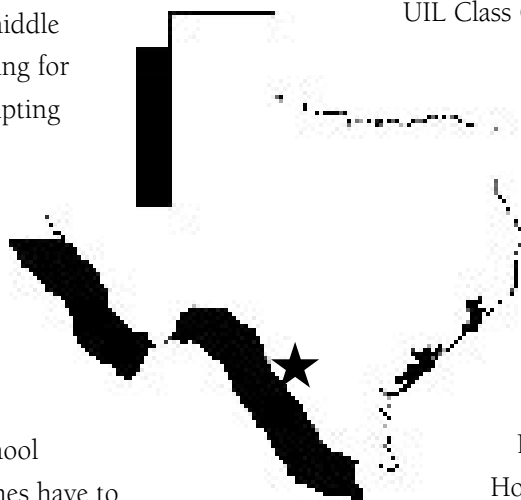
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the present school population of 33,623 students with 24 elementary schools (all are Title 1 campuses), eight middle schools, and four 5A high schools.

The rapid growth of UISD and the numerous boundary changes that have occurred over the years have presented many challenges for band directors such as maintaining a good program enrollment and a balanced instrumentation. Other challenges faced by directors on a yearly basis include AB block for middle schools, block scheduling for high schools and attempting to keep high school students enrolled in band classes all four years due to increased graduation requirements and magnet school requirements. High school band directors sometimes have to see the students early in the morning at 7:30 AM before regular classes begin or after school when students are not enrolled in the band classes. It has been through their dedication, planning, and perseverance that they have been able to maintain a healthy band program while striving for enrollments of 200 or more students.

In addition, working with students of low socio-economic and multicultural backgrounds, has been challenging yet rewarding for UISD band directors. High school and middle school Mariachi groups are popular with the students as well as performing and competing Jazz programs like the one at United High School.



A few notable recent accomplishments:

- A. Gonzalez Middle School, received a Sweepstakes Award in its first year of entering UIL Class CC Concert & Sight Reading Contest.
- Trautmann Middle School Band in 2002, placed 13th in the State TMEA honor band process.
- Clark Middle School Band recently achieved its 6th UIL Class CC Sweepstakes Award.
- Band programs at S. Garcia, Los Obispos, United Middle, United South, and Washington Middle have remained active and successful in all UIL and TMEA competitions.
- United High School has achieved 20 Sweepstakes awards and has advanced to the TMEA Music Region XIV Area level auditions in the Honor Band process in 2002.
- United South High School Band advanced to the Region XIV Area level in the TMEA Honor Band process in 2004.
- Alexander High School Band with over 200 members will be participating in the 2005 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.
- LBJ High School, one of the newest high schools in UISD, has already achieved student success in UIL Marching and Concert contests.
- In 2005, United ISD had a total of eight All State Musicians that qualified for the TMEA All State groups such as the Orchestra, Treble Choir, Band, and Jazz.

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The United States, known as a powerful nation, derived its extraordinary ranking from the combined talents and unique traits of the many cultural populations. Similarly, UISD builds the success of its programs from the cultural diversity within the student population. The music programs measure student success by the amount of students that have the opportunity to participate in mariachi, orchestra, jazz, concert, choral, symphonic, and marching bands. This success has been achieved through the support and collaborative effort of our community and school administrators, together with the endless dedication of our directors and students.

United ISD Band Directors:

United High School	Antonio Gonzalez Middle School	Clark Middle School
John J. Mallon, Director	Carlos Miranda, Director	Gilbert Cuellar, Director
Frank K. Foster, Asst. Director	Elias A. Flores, Asst. Director	Sergio Valderrama, Asst. Director
Jose M. Castro, Asst. Director	Los Obispos Middle School	Salvador Garcia Middle School
Hector Gil, Asst. Director	Reymundo Ramos, Director	Christopher Moore, Director
United South High School	Yvette Miranda, Asst. Director	Roel Flores, Asst. Director
Carlos Gil, Director	Trautmann Middle School	Antonio Gonzalez Middle School
Abel Vergara Jr., Asst. Director	Edmundo Garcia Jr., Director	Carlos Miranda, Director
Oscar Diaz Jr., Asst. Director	Jorge L. Garcia, Asst. Director	Elias A. Flores, Asst. Director
Alexander High School	United Middle School	Los Obispos Middle School
Roger H. Duran, Director	Hiram Gonzales, Director	Reymundo Ramos, Director
Robert Castro, Asst. Director	Graciela Gonzales, Asst. Director	Yvette Miranda, Asst. Director
Jose Lopez, Asst. Director	United South Middle School	Trautmann Middle School
Daniel Lugo, Asst. Director	Yolanda Moreno, Director	Edmundo Garcia Jr., Director
Lyndon B. Johnson High School	San Juanita Rodriguez, Asst. Dir.	Jorge L. Garcia, Asst. Director
Eliseo Morales Jr., Director	George Washington Middle School	United Middle School
Peter Carrillo, Asst. Director	Dennis O. Eveland, Director	Hiram Gonzales, Director
Rafael Morales, Jr., Asst. Director	Abel Garza Jr., Asst. Director	Graciela Gonzales, Asst. Director
Clark Middle School	Lyndon B. Johnson High School	United South Middle School
Gilbert Cuellar, Director	Eliseo Morales Jr., Director	Yolanda Moreno, Director
Sergio Valderrama, Asst. Director	Peter Carrillo, Asst. Director	San Juanita Rodriguez, Asst. Dir.
Salvador Garcia Middle School	Rafael Morales, Jr., Asst. Director	George Washington Middle School
Christopher Moore, Director		Dennis O. Eveland, Director
Roel Flores, Asst. Director		Abel Garza Jr., Asst. Director

Having taught for 20 years, with 13 of those years as band director for United High School, Javier Vera has completed 8 years as Director of Fine Arts for United I.S.D.. He has a Bachelor of Music from University of North Texas in Denton, a Master of Music Education from VanderCook College of Music in Chicago, and Mid-Management Certification from Texas A&M International University. Mr. Vera is an active member of TMEA, TBA, TMAA and TMAC.