

# Shape the Future of Your Marching Season

## I've been given the role of marching band director...what do I do??

By Kendall Santos

---

From being one of the first student groups back on campus in July, to providing entertainment at pep rallies and football games, to performing across the country in professional stadiums, the marching band is one of the largest and most visible organizations on campus. Taking on the role of marching band director is an important and rewarding experience, but it also can be pretty daunting if you do not have the right tools and systems in place to be organized and to feel successful. Having a plan, both on the macro and micro level throughout your marching season, is the best way to ensure that YOU, as the director, feel ready to provide an incredible experience for your students! The first step will be to divide your marching season into the separate phases:

**Post Season** (November - December)

**Spring Semester** (January - March)

**Spring Semester** (April - May)

**Summer** (June - Mid July)

**Band Camp** (Late July - Mid August)

**Pre-Contest Season** (Late August - September)

**Contest Season** (Bandtober)

**POST SEASON** (November - December)

If you are currently on a high school staff, the best way to improve from year to year as a team is to evaluate what went well and what needs to improve in your most recent season together. Shortly after the marching season has ended, find some time to reflect on the pros and cons of the season as a full staff. In these meetings, consider if the musical selections offered curriculum for the full season, if the visual design enhanced the concept and brought the music to life, and if the concept was clear and something the students could connect with and enjoyed performing. Other things to consider are what strengths, musically and visually, do you want to showcase in the upcoming year, and what weaknesses do you want to keep out of focus.

If your teaching team also designs the show together, or if your school hires out designers / program coordinators, being very transparent and clear about your program's vision is imperative to your whole team feeling confident moving forward.

**SPRING SEMESTER** (January - March)

After your team has created a concept and selected the music, the very first thing to do is to receive arranging / copyright permissions. Once the music has been approved and your arranger begins writing, or you have purchased your pre-written show, this is where you can get ahead and begin to look at your rosters for the next year. Start communicating with your middle school campuses and learning who will be coming to the high school the next year. It's good to review students' musical ability, their work ethic, how they carry themselves in the band hall, and **their grades** for eligibility consideration. Many high school directors are already present in the classrooms of their middle schools, so this process may already be seamless! This will allow you to begin planning for how many drill spots you'll be able to march in the Fall. Work with your drill writer to see what combination of numbers works best for both your program, but also for your drill writer to write effective and exciting drill.

March is a good time to begin working on visual design. What does the concept look like, do you have a show logo, are you using props / front screens / backdrops and what do they look like? Who is in charge of designing the guard costumes, and do they know 1) when you'd like a draft of the costume and 2) when you want the costumes on campus?

Lastly, make sure your team knows what the workflow is within the staff or from designer to designer. Decide after the wind book is sent, or at least a part of the music is sent, who receives it next (percussion arranger, electronics arranger, etc.) and who is in charge of sending it to that designer (band director or program coordinator).

**These 3 months are where communication is key to ensure your team is on time to meet deadlines before school gets released.**

## Shape the Future of Your Marching Season

**SPRING SEMESTER** (April - May...What you should be doing RIGHT NOW!)

April 1 should be a big landmark - it's the time to start planning leadership auditions, any "Spring Marching Band Camp / Showcase," begin building props, and also recruit 8th graders / retain current high schoolers.

Use your leadership auditions to generate excitement and build expectations for what you want to see from them and the general membership in the Fall. Consider it a "reset" button to start fresh and build up the culture for what the fall *should look and feel like*. If your calendar allows and you have the facilities to do so, continue to build excitement through a "show reveal" where students get hooked on the concept and see how excited you are about the Fall! This is often the first event we invite the 8th graders to so they feel like they are a part of the team before they show up for the Spring Marching Band Camp.

If your program offers a Spring Marching Band Camp, it should be about creating the right culture, procedures, and excitement you want to surround the Fall. A good goal to have would be to play through the opener with percussion, a stand tune, fight song, and begin to introduce visual concepts so they have something to practice over the summer. By the end of the camp, your students should have an understanding of what the expectation of preparation / memorization is for their music when they return to you in July.

**SUMMER** (June - Mid July)

This is when you get to vacation...

...but your student leaders should be hard at work! This is a great time for leaders to organize section parties that are paired with music learning sessions. They are a BLAST and oftentimes are kids' favorite memories from the beginning of the year. Depending on your program wide goals, a good benchmark would be for all students to have played through all notes and rhythms of the music before showing up to band camp.

**BAND CAMP** (Late July - Mid August)

Before planning your band camp, start with a macro

calendar of what you want the entire season. Start planning backwards and decide when you'd like the FULL show on the field, what you want to perform at your first contest, what you want to perform at your first football game, and what you want on the field by the first day of school. This will guide how quickly you need to pace the music / drill learning process beginning August 1 to meet your performance goals of the first day of school and first game. Knowing how quickly you want to learn the show will guide how quickly you need to introduce marching fundamentals during the first week of band camp before you're allowed to learn drill.

Once you receive drill in the summer, look at it to see how advanced / intricate it is as this will also help with your macro planning of the semester. Many times, directors will get behind in their drill learning process because they did not plan for some of the performance notes / performer required skills in order for them to execute the drill at a high level from day 1.

**PRE-CONTEST SEASON** (Late August - September)

Once school starts, it's a race against the clock with the 8-hour rule! When planning for the week, have a big performance goal for the week as well as daily "checkpoints" to ensure you are on schedule. Make sure every rehearsal has a plan down to the minute, all working towards the daily checkpoints and weekly goal. **Please know that all plans, much like rules, are meant to be broken!** Some days they will go exactly as planned down to the minute, but know there needs to be flexibility when a project needs to be camped out on. With all that being said, without a plan, you are losing against the 8-hour rule.

Maximize your class time by getting your class outside if you can! Marching contests aren't inside a band hall marking time, they're outside moving and playing. The more you can simulate their actual performance environment, the more you build individual accountability and performer confidence.

As you prepare for contest season, if you are a school who has clinicians visit your program, know what their strengths are and why you hired them so you can best fit them into your macro plan. Some clinicians are great at zooming in on processes and procedures, others are great

## Shape the Future of Your Marching Season

at spotting “long term projects” early on, and others are great at being a professional performance coach. Put them in your season where they can build confidence in both you and your students. If you are unable to have clinicians visit your school, send videos to people you respect and trust! There is SO much value in a film study from rehearsal or a run through video.

### CONTEST SEASON (“Bandtober”)

You’ve attended your first contest and you have a thousand things on your to-do list and a million opinions in your ear of how to make the band better. This is the time of season to follow your gut and listen to the people you trust and who know the program the best.

Listen to the judges’ tapes, take notes during the performance, go to critique, but at the end of the day, put it all through a filter. You and your team will need to decide what is the most 1) important and in line with your curriculum, 2) in the best interest of the kids and community, and 3) what is realistic to your timeline and overall goals.

### TIME TO PLAN!

In the words of Evan VanDoren, “You can overcome a lack of experience through increased preparation.” Zoom

out, look at your whole season, and envision what you want it to look and feel like by the end. The best way to ensure you breathe confidence into your students is by breaking up your season into phases that work within your calendar and to set goals for each step along the way.

As the marching band director, you have the ability to shape the future of your marching season NOW through how you plan for later. The result at the end should not be that of competitive success but should be a positive culture and confidence for both you and your students throughout your fall season!

*Kendall Santos is an Associate Director of Bands and the Marching Band Director at Cedar Park High School. She serves as an employee of the SASI Leadership Company, an ambassador for The Breakdown Camp with Michael Rosales, and a marching band clinician for Central Texas. Kendall assisted the Cedar Park Marching Band win its third (2019) and fourth (2021) consecutive gold medals at the UIL 5A State Marching Contest. Under her direction, the band has been a consistent BOA finalist, Waco Regional Champion (2021 & 2022), and has consistently won captions at BOA. Kendall conducts the Concert Band, Symphonic Band, and currently works with the Wind Symphony. Her concert ensembles, at all levels, have consistently received superior ratings at UIL Concert and Sight-Reading.*

## Apply Now for TBA Scholarships



Malcolm Helm

TBA scholarship applications are currently being accepted. **Encourage your students to apply NOW; the deadline is May 15, 2023.** Current college students majoring in Music Education in a Texas school and who plan to teach band in Texas are eligible.

TBA will present TWO \$4000 scholarships at the summer convention: the Malcolm Helm Memorial Scholarship and the Alfred F. Sturchio Scholarship.

For other criteria and to apply, visit [texasbandmasters.org](https://texasbandmasters.org). Candidates will submit ONE application to be considered for both scholarships. For questions and comments, contact Reagan Brumley, Scholarship Committee Chair, at [rabrumley@gmail.com](mailto:rabrumley@gmail.com).



Al Sturchio