



**Texas Bandmasters Association  
Convention/Clinic July 25-27, 2019**

**Vandegrift HS Concert Bands:  
Culture, Musicianship and  
Fundamentals**

**CLINICIAN:  
Mike Howard**

**HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

# Vandegriff HS Concert Bands

Culture, Musicianship and Fundamentals



Vandegriff High School  
Leander I.S.D.

Mike Howard, Katie VanDoren

[mike.howard@leanderisd.org](mailto:mike.howard@leanderisd.org)

[Katherine.vandoren@leanderisd.org](mailto:Katherine.vandoren@leanderisd.org)

[www.vhsband.com](http://www.vhsband.com)

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention

CC 214AB

Thursday, July 25, 2019

4:00 - 5:00 AM

# Culture and Musicianship

TEACH THEM TO LOVE BAND. TEACH THEM TO LOVE MUSIC.

*"Have a vision for the culture and musicianship of your band program, and let that vision drive decision making"*

- **Culture Starts with a Vision**
  - Have a vision for the cultural and musical goals of the program
  - Work with your staff on how to implement the culture
  - Do everything in your power to PROTECT IT!
- **Culture is driven by relationships**
  - Student relationships
  - Staff relationships
  - Community relationships
  - Administrative relationships
- **Culture is driven by Non-Varsity Bands**
  - Non-Varsity bands and younger students are the cornerstone of any band program
  - Young musicians and young adults must be celebrated, cultivated and nourished
  - A lack of this concept creates the infamous "rebuilding year"
- **Musicianship is Why You Are Here**
  - Teach students to love music as much as you do
  - Music drives the need for fundamental work...not the opposite. A student and staff understanding of this will increase buy-in to fundamental work
  - Programming is a big factor to musical buy-in from the students. Do not take programming lightly for ANY concert...they all matter.
  - Program for where you want them to end up, not for where they are

# Fundamental Approach

LESS IS MORE

*"Ensemble fundamentals train the student what it sounds like and feels like to be part of a great ensemble sound."*

- **Air is Everything**
  - *"The number one factor in making a professional sound, and not an amateur one...is air support"* – Allen Vizzutti
  - Staff pays very close attention to everything about how the students use their air
  - Be careful to distinguish between air "exercises" and "practical" air use
  - In ALL fundamental exercises, air is always the foundation of information
- **Concert F – Long Tones**
  - The start of each rehearsal
  - All concepts should transition from air concepts into long tones
  - We use this ensemble note to learn the keys to section balance/sound
    - Play the same volume as your neighbor
    - Make the same type of sound as your neighbor
    - Match intonation with your neighbor
  - It is our experience that **80% of tuning issues are actually tone issues**; students and directors should always evaluate individual tone before tuning
  - This is our time teach students how to "follow through" with their vowel shape at the end of the note
- **Remington – Long Tones**
  - This is a great opportunity to teach students to have the same sound on different lengths of tubing
  - A great opportunity for students to understand the tendencies of their instrument...which is so important!
- **1-5-4-3-2-7-1 – MORE LONG TONES!**
  - Utilizing these scale degrees (against a tonic drone), we teach the following concepts
    - Don't let intervals affect volume...be in control of your individual sound
    - Intonation needs for specific chord tones (specifically 1-3-5-7)
    - Ensemble balance – What is your role in the full ensemble sound
      - "Mass Instruments" vs. "Color Instruments"
- **Articulation**
  - Detailed articulation work and multiple tonguing work is completed in sectional time
  - Ensemble articulation exercises are simple, but valuable
  - Find an "exemplar" in each section. This is HUGE!! Students need to know what it is supposed to sound like

- Be careful not to confuse firmness of articulation with "not together"
- **No Music for Fundamental Work**
  - Students should only be focusing on the physical attributes of playing their instrument
  - Push the stands down and observe their faces, posture, etc.
  - React to what you actually hear and see
  - Create a macro to micro list for what you're going to listen for

## Vandegrift Concert Band "Year at a Glance"

### **The Fall Semester**

*"A great concert program is built by developing individual players."*

- **Private Lessons**
  - While lessons are not a requirement of the program, it has been established as a culture within the program
  - Being in a private lesson studio has become "the cool thing to do"
  - Scholarships are available for students who cannot afford lessons (this is done through the band boosters and LISD)
  - The Goal – ANY student who wants to take lessons SHOULD and CAN
  - Currently around 90% of the students in the program take lessons
  - With a private lesson faculty – be selective...it's not just about the quality of their information. They help create the culture of any given section. Their BIGGEST goal should be to get their students excited about their instrument.
  - An excited student...will practice.
- **TMEA All-State Etudes**
  - SmartMusic – *"Technology can be our friend."*
    - Students have weekly SmartMusic assignments over predetermined cuts from their etudes
    - The goal is completion and accuracy. Students can choose their own tempo.
    - This allows students in all bands to participate. Students in bands 1 and 2 are required to participate
  - Master Classes/Hearing Times – *"Listening to individuals is time consuming...but worth it!"*
    - Students receive a weekly master class in the morning over their All-State etudes and over specific pedagogy that pertains to their instrument
    - Master Classes are taught by private lesson faculty
    - Master Class teachers teach instrument specific fundamental exercises
    - Band Directors spend mornings listening to individual hearing times
    - ALL students in the top two bands are required to have individual hearing times
      - Recording assignments are fine, however...nothing replaces the benefit of live hearing times with band directors
    - Students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> band can work their way into the Hearing Time process by regular attendance and quality preparation in master classes AND highly scored SmartMusic assignments
    - All hearing times are scored and students are ranked. This allows the band staff continuous documentation which proves very useful when chairing bands for the Spring Semester
    - Hearing Time Season concludes with one large Mock Audition. All students who successfully complete the Mock Audition are allowed the opportunity to audition for Region Band
  - Region Band Auditions – *"Make Region Auditions 'the cool thing to do'"*
    - All students in Band 1 and Band 2 must successfully complete the hearing time process and audition for Region Band
    - If this does not happen, these students cannot retain their position in that ensemble for the spring semester
    - Students should be excited to be given the green light to audition
    - Getting the students to buy into this process has been the single most important factor toward building our individual musicians
- **Winter Concert**
  - All bands perform – *"Every performance matters...even those that aren't UIL."*
    - The winter concert is a great 4-week introduction into the concert season
    - All ensemble fundamentals are introduced
    - All 4 bands prepare two pieces to create a concert that is approximately 1.5 hours long (with transitions)
    - This concert is a celebration of music and is a fun evening
    - Quality is NOT overlooked. All bands are expected to perform at a high level.

- Avoid creating a program philosophy where music is only detailed for UIL performance. A high level of detail on ALL performances will pay off

## The Spring Semester

### INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM

*"Don't let individual work stop after Region Band. Time to spend the semester on solo work!"*

- **Solo Competition**

- ALL Students participate – *"Make it a requirement."*
  - Every student works with a lesson teacher or staff member to select appropriate literature
  - Having students actively involved in solo selection will help with "buy-in"
  - Student buy-in to the Solo Competition is an important part of the total program culture
- Literature – *"All solos should to be tailored to the individual."*
  - A student should get a solo that challenges them to learn and develop new playing techniques
  - Students will work on this solo until late April. What skill set do you want them to obtain by late April? – let that be the driving force of the students' solo selection
  - Don't over-program...but DO challenge the student technically and musically
- VHS Solo Competition – *"We keep it in house."*
  - All students participate in our Solo Competition at the end of April
  - The contest is run in a very similar fashion to the UIL Region Solo and Ensemble
  - All judges are directors/professionals outside the program
  - Students receive division ratings (1-5) from their judge...One's are hard to get
  - Each judge selects two students to compete in a semi-finals round
  - The students compete a week later in a semi-finals round for the band staff, where 8-10 finalists are named
- VHS Solo Finals Concert – *"This has become my favorite concert of the year!"*
  - Within our band culture, making the "Solo Finals" is a BIG DEAL
  - We work to bring in a high-level guest artist for the event
  - All finalist students get an opportunity to have a lesson with our guest artist
  - The concert is judged by three collegiate level judges. All students are given a plaque and the top three win scholarship money
  - The solo contest (semi-finals/finals) process has become a large part of our band culture. The students and parents look forward to it every year

- **Band Auditions**

- Audition Timing – *"Make an immediate transition from Solo Competition."*
  - Students receive audition music at the end of April
  - All students have 4 weeks to prepare (approx.)
  - This gives lesson teachers a constant individual curriculum for the semester
- Audition Etudes – *"Learn the show!"*
  - For most instruments, excerpts from the next marching show are used for audition
  - For non-marching band instruments, appropriate etudes are chosen
  - The audition consists of three etudes, major and minor scales
  - All auditions are done live by a band director

- **Chamber Music**

- Percussion Ensemble – *"Time to get off the marching instruments!"*
  - A comprehensive percussion ensemble program is very important to developing well-rounded percussionists
  - Percussionists spend the month of January and February exclusively in percussion ensembles during class; they do not join the band in class until the end of Feb.
- Instrument Choirs – *"If you build it, they will come."*
  - All groups are organized by a band director
  - Private lesson faculty members teach their respective groups (horn choir, trombone choir, brass choir, saxophone choir and flute choir)
  - Chamber music is not a requirement...students volunteer if they are interested
  - It didn't take long for LOTS of students to want to join
  - Again, building interest and chamber music becoming part of band culture is important
  - Most chamber music rehearsals happen in the afternoon/evening

# The Spring Semester

## ENSEMBLE CURRICULUM

*"Great musicians are created in the Spring Semester. If you want a great marching band, have an even better concert band."*

### • UIL Contest Preparation

- Participation – "Every student must go to UIL."
  - All bands, regardless of size or skill level, will participate in the UIL Concert & Sight-Reading Evaluation
  - UIL preparation and performance is an important growth opportunity
- Literature Selection – "Program for what you want them to be in April, not for where they are now."
  - Literature selection for Non-Varsity bands poses the following questions
    - Where are the section weaknesses? – these sections need to be highlighted at least a few times...this will force you to teach them up!
    - Where are the section strengths? – Lean on these sections with literature
    - What skill sets need to be taught? – i.e. It's important that the 2<sup>nd</sup> band has a considerable amount of double-tongue articulation in the brass/flutes
    - What ensemble and fundamental skills do the students need to successfully audition into and play within the next ensemble up?
      - A Non-Varsity band should finish the semester with at least 50% of the students having developed the skill set to very successfully participate in the next band.
  - For literature selection regarding the Varsity band, see the "Honor Band" section below
- Rehearsal Structure – "Section rehearsal season is a great culture building time for each section!"
  - Section Rehearsals – every student has a 1 hour section rehearsal each week
    - This is a great time to teach instrument specific pedagogy
    - This is a great time to develop "section culture" in a smaller, more relaxed environment
    - This should be done by the primary conductor of the ensemble
    - Always teaching your own sectionals will give you valuable teaching experience and study on the instruments you are less comfortable teaching
  - Large Section Rehearsals – sectionals develop into larger sections after 7-8 weeks.
  - Full Ensemble Rehearsals – large section rehearsals develop into larger full ensemble rehearsals two weeks prior to a performance
- Sight Reading – "It's a pain...but it's important!"
  - All sight-reading rehearsals happen during class rehearsals
  - Sight Reading is starts in the lower bands with lots of rhythm reading
  - The fourth band does some form of sight-reading at least 3 times per week
  - Each band should develop the ability to read one level higher than they will be expected to
  - This may not be possible with the lowest band
    - DO NOT let the lowest band's sight-reading ability prevent you from taking them to UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Contest

### • Honor Band Preparation – Try to take the same approach regardless of whether you're recording. The only thing that will change for me is potentially literature selection

- Literature Selection – "Something old and something new...and a march."
  - We do not have orchestra in LISD, so it is educationally important for the students to play an orchestral transcription. Orchestral literature provides an entirely new palette of colors and ensemble sound expectations
    - Be careful when selecting which transcription to use. There are LOTS of different ones out there if you do the research. UIL has really opened the door for different transcriptions with the "different edition with the same content" rule on the PML
  - There is a wealth of new wind ensemble literature out there that will contrast with an older band piece or orchestral transcription.
  - Soloists and small ensembles are the key – program music that features the most elite players in your band
  - Do not program what you "think you should" for an Honor Band recording. Program the music that fits you and your students and is right for the development of your band program...Music that all involved will completely buy into.
  - Pick a march that has the opportunity to hear lots of different colors...Sousa is my "go to"!
- Timeline – "Develop a timeline that is in the best interest of music education."
  - The performance/recording timeline that is right for us is as follows
    - Late March – Pre-UIL Concert (might get the march recording)

- Mid-April – UIL Concert & Sight-Reading (have to get the march and hopefully one other recording)
  - Late April/Early May – Festival (get the rest done!)
    - We had great experience with Round Top
    - The recording engineer matters more than just the room
  - Early May – Schedule a backup performance in case something “weird” happens
    - I’ve never had to use this date
  - Most of the ensemble takes AP courses...because of this, I do not record past AP exams
  - After our late April/Early May recording, we will learn new music for the Spring Concert
    - This new music is a GREAT stress relief outlet during AP exams
    - The new music, which is typically VERY student centered, is a great musical celebration to conclude the semester (or conclude the band experience for our Seniors)
  - Try not to let the competitive aspect of this process cause scheduling and performance decisions that aren't in the best interest of your students and your program
- **Clinicians and resources**
    - Find a regular mentor and clinician for the band – *“Develop a program to clinician relationship.”*
      - One of the benefits of a regular clinician is that they can diagnose progress over a period of time. This is important to gain insight into overall program development.
      - The other benefit is to have your students and staff develop a positive relationship. After a few visits, the clinic environment gets comfortable...which is important for all involved.
    - Ask questions – *“I still don't really think I know what I'm doing!”*
      - The best part of our profession – everybody is willing to help!
      - Don't be afraid to ask questions about...everything. The constant exchange of ideas, teaching of each other, and willingness to be mentored will sustain Texas Bands for years to come.