What if my student does not play a marching band instrument?

All students are welcome to participate in marching band, even if they don’t play a traditional marching band instrument. No experience is necessary, just enthusiasm and a willingness to work hard. Speak to Mr. Shearer about joining the dance line or learning a new instrument. Those with piano background often join the front ensemble (pit) and play keyboard instruments (marimba, vibraphone, etc.) which are designed like a piano. Students interested in dance or drama may find a home in the dance line. Other students choose to learn a new instrument, based on instrumentation needs within the ensemble.

What if my child joins but later wants to quit?

Students are strongly encouraged to stick with it, once they have made the commitment to marching band. Based on the membership contracts and payments, we hire music arrangers and drill writers to design the show. By mid-June, this process is already well under way. If a student later quits, it causes major problems. (See below for details.)

Marching band is a very challenging activity. It is normal for students, especially new members, to feel frustrated at times because there is so much to learn. As they push through their frustration, they learn valuable lessons about perseverance, teamwork and the value of honoring a commitment. They also experience a sense of pride at accomplishing things they never thought possible. These are the life lessons that marching band is designed to teach. If your student is talking about quitting, please contact Mr. Shearer to work through the situation. There may be a way to help him/her feel better about participating.

What happens if a student quits after making the commitment?

If a student quits after making the initial commitment, it causes some serious problems for the staff and other members of the program. Here are a few issues that arise when someone quits:

1. All the music and drill must be re-written to cover that student’s parts. This is a very painstaking and time-consuming process and means that drill and music which should be completely learned over the summer would not be ready to be taught until well into September or even October. At that point in the season, students have homework and other responsibilities. It puts a real burden on them to be re-learning parts when they should be just perfecting them.

2. The other members of the marching band feel very frustrated when their valuable time is wasted by other students who fail to follow through on their commitments. The marching band members take it very seriously that they depend on one another and try not to let each other down.
3. The music program may have to pay additional fees to writers and arrangers to fix the empty spaces left by students who quit.

4. At time injuries or other unavoidable personal situations mean that a student who intended to participate is no longer able to. This is unfortunate for them and for our program because we really want every student to be able to participate fully. At the same time, it has been our experience that many students who talk about quitting have never been in a situation where they truly have to work hard and persevere through an experience as challenging as marching band. Please encourage your student to stick with it. Honoring a commitment is one of the most valuable lessons we can teach our young people. What does it teach our young people when they are permitted to quit an activity as soon as it becomes challenging?

**Why is there a marching band fee?**

The marching band fee gives us some guaranteed income to begin preparing for the season. When used in combination, the fee and the fundraisers will generate enough income to provide for the needs of the marching band. The fee is not meant to prevent anyone from participating. If this fee would tip the scales toward non-participation, please contact Mr. Shearer to work through the situation. There is a $100 commitment fee due at the time of registration. The balance will be due on the first day of band camp. There is a $50 discount for every extra child a family has participating.

**Why do we still have fundraisers?**

All members are expected to participate in fundraisers in addition to the marching band participation fee. Although many people believe that the marching band fee is enough of a financial contribution to cover the costs of marching band, this is simply not true. The fee generates approximately half of the overall marching band budget. The actual expenses for each season are closer to $1000 per student. We operate on a budget of nearly $50,000 which must cover: transportation (busses, equipment trucks, and drivers), staff salaries, wind arrangements, percussion arrangements, copyright permissions, drill design and consultation, dance line design and equipment, costumes, uniform maintenance, competition fees, and any other miscellaneous expenses that arise throughout the season.

**Could we field a marching band for less?**

Sure. But we would not be able to offer a full competitive schedule or challenge our students with the high level of music, drill, and choreography that they deserve. The educational value of marching band is diminished if the music is too easy, the visual design fails to excite, and the students aren’t inspired to reach their fullest potential. Please support our efforts by participating in fundraisers! If we don’t raise enough money through fundraising, we will be forced to make cuts to the marching program and/or increase the fee! In case you are thinking that the high cost of marching band comes from exorbitant staff salaries, please understand that our staff members are paid very little (far below minimum wage) for the time, effort, and expertise they offer to our students. They teach marching band because they love the activity, not to get rich!
What is the parents’ role in marching band?

Parental support is vital to the success of our program! Please support our efforts to provide the best possible educational opportunity by:

- Encouraging active participation in all marching band activities
- Encouraging practice
- Supporting (through words and actions) the marching band staff, students, and volunteers
- Making sure students are “where they need to be.” Follow the schedule closely to make sure your student attends all rehearsals and performances. Look through the entire schedule before the season begins and communicate any conflicts with Mr. Shearer immediately.
- Providing financial resources by participating in fundraisers and/or paying all fees on time.
- Communicating any questions, concerns, conflicts or problems with Mr. Shearer as soon as they happen. The staff cannot correct problems which are not brought to their attention in a timely manner. Positive comments are also encouraged if you feel that some aspect of the program is going particularly well.
- Attending as many performances as your schedule permits. Teenagers sometimes say they don’t want you there, but the truth is that your presence means a lot to them. In a few years, they will not remember their scores or placements but they will always remember that you were there for them.
- Signing up for the email list which provides the timeliest information about upcoming marching band activities.
- Guiding students to manage their time wisely and complete all school assignments in a timely and professional manner.
- VOLUNTEERING to help with dinners, fundraisers, sewing flags, fitting uniforms, moving equipment, building props, organizing carpools, chaperoning, etc. For those who choose to become involved, the band becomes like a second family. We want everyone to be part of our family!

Do students have to attend all of the summer rehearsals?

Students are expected to attend all summer rehearsals with the exception of those that occur during previously scheduled vacations or camps. Summer rehearsals are held only a few times and typically are for specific sections of the band, so students should arrange their work schedules to accommodate marching band rehearsals. Advance notice of absence is required.

Do students have to attend all of band camp?

Yes. **Students must attend all of band camp.** This is a group activity which requires everyone’s participation. Unlike athletic teams, there are no substitute players. If students miss a rehearsal or performance, there is no one to cover their parts. The majority of music and drill are learned during band camp. If students miss band camp, they create more work for themselves, staff members and other students, in order to help them learn the material they missed. The calendar for band camp has been published well in advance to allow families to arrange their summer plans around it. If there is an unavoidable conflict, speak to Mr. Shearer ASAP.
Why is band camp so long?

The hours for band camp may seem long but they are necessary in order to learn the show. Our hope is that the majority of the show will be learned over the summer before students have homework and other school responsibilities. The daily schedule has been created to allow time for rest and re-hydration between our rehearsal sets.

Do students have to be enrolled in a music class to participate?

Students are strongly encouraged to enroll in the Marching Band class, Concert Band or Jazz Ensemble (Jazz Ensemble is by audition) and dancers to enroll in dance classes at a dance studio (unfortunately dance classes are not offered at MHS at this time). However, this is not currently a requirement for participation in the Marching Knights.

What equipment/supplies will they need?

For all rehearsals, students need their instrument, water, binder, drill chart/drill coordinates, towel, proper clothing and shoes, sunscreen, and a pencil. Percussionists should bring any sticks or mallets they use during the show. Students should wear comfortable clothing that allows for freedom of movement. Acceptable clothing includes tennis shoes with socks, t-shirts, shorts, sweats, and athletic pants. Do not wear sandals, jeans, high-top sneakers, dress shoes or any other clothing that restricts movement. FCPS policies state that students must use footwear at all times while on FCPS property. All students should also bring water and a hat. Dress for the weather. Summer rehearsals will be hot, but evening rehearsals in October and November will be cold.

It’s raining/snowing outside. Does that mean rehearsal/performance is cancelled?

No. Rehearsals and performances are not cancelled unless there is an announcement made by Mr. Shearer. Students should be prepared to practice and perform outside in all types of weather. If the forecast is calling for inclement weather, bring a raincoat and/or winter weather gear to rehearsal. For competitions, football games, and parades bring the appropriate cold weather gear to wear under the uniform.

Guidelines for cold weather wear...

- Anything worn underneath the uniform must not be seen by the audience or restrict marching and maneuvering, or spinning.
- (Black) Turtlenecks are acceptable (Under Armour ColdWear is exceptional!)
- Foot warmers and glove-size hand warmers are acceptable.
- If you have a second pair of gloves slightly bigger than the first, you can slip the hand warmer in between the two pairs to hold them in place and keep the heat from direct contact with the skin. These typically last for up to 8 hours.
Football Information

What is the marching band’s responsibility during football games?

The marching band plays an important role in entertaining the crowd and cheering for our team. We perform the National Anthem, fight song and other crowd pleasers. We play pep tunes, aka stand jams, and cheer for our team during the game and perform our field show at half-time.

Half-time is over. Can my student leave the game now?

No. All students are expected to attend the entire game. Football games are part of the commitment that all members make to the marching band.

Why does the dance line have to be there? They don’t play instruments.

The dance line is an integral section within the Marching Knight family. Although they don’t play instruments, they can still participate by cheering for the team and by dancing to the stand jams.

Where does the marching band sit? Do the parents sit together?

Facing the field, the marching band sits to the right of the press box. Marching band parents usually sit in a group behind the band. You can often identify them because they are wearing “Pride Wear”. We hope parents will come to the games and enjoy socializing with each other, watching the game and listening to the band.

Competition Information

Where and when are the competitions?

Marching competitions are usually held on Saturdays (occasionally on Sunday), beginning in mid-September and ending with Championships in November. Any school can host a competition (usually called a “show”). Some competitions are even held at colleges and professional sports complexes. The closest shows in our circuit are held throughout Maryland and our neighboring states. Most competitive marching bands compete in at least one show per weekend, and some even perform at more than one show (for instance, if there is an afternoon show scheduled near an evening show). Middletown will generally compete at the closest shows, although there may be times when there are no competitions nearby and we must travel a bit farther. The James Madison University Parade of Champions in Harrisonburg, VA is a highly anticipated competition every year.

How do we get to the show?

All marching band members and chaperones will travel to and from each show on the bus unless prior arrangements have been made in writing with Mr. Shearer and MHS Administration. Parents and fans must provide their own transportation. Directions will be made available during the week prior to each show or you are welcome to follow the busses. NOTE: If you choose to follow the busses, you may not arrive at the show until after it has already begun. You
may also need to park in a separate area from the busses. There are usually signs or volunteers directing traffic once you arrive at the show.

Do we need tickets for the show?

Marching Band members get in free, but there is an admission fee of ranging from $5 to $20 (or more) for spectators. Some shows may cost more such as championships or shows at a professional stadium. For some shows, tickets will be available through a designated Middletown booster parent. Tickets can also be purchased at the gate. Please support our marching band by purchasing your tickets through Middletown whenever possible. All proceeds from tickets sold through Middletown will benefit our students by helping to offset fees charged by the competitive circuit. Tickets purchased at the gate benefit the host school or the sponsoring circuit. It’s great to support music education at all the schools but we like it even more when our own students can benefit!

What is a typical show like?

Shows usually begin with the smallest bands (Group I) and end with the largest bands (Group 6). Due to our size, Middletown will generally perform toward the middle of the show. Each band has approximately 15 minutes to set up, perform and clean up the field. You will see judges walking around on the field during the show, watching and listening for particular elements. There are also judges in the announcer’s booth, who watch for the overall effect of the performance. The stadium will be filled with fans and the performing bands, while areas of the parking lots and athletic fields will be filled with bands warming up. It can be fun to walk around and listen to the groups warming up. It is also nice to support the other performers by watching them from the stands.

How do we get the best seats?

The best seats are as close to the 50 yard line and as high up in the stands as possible. Naturally, these are the first to go. If you want to have the best seats, arrive before the show begins and stake out your spot. (REMEMBER: If you opt to follow the busses, you may not arrive at the show until after it has begun.) Wear your “Pride Wear” and look for other Middletown fans so everyone can sit together.

This is a great opportunity to see other bands perform and support their hard work. There are some very talented marching bands in our area and it can be a real treat to see them perform. If you don’t care about seating, your other option is to arrive late at the show just to watch Middletown and/or the bands in our group.

Is there any special etiquette to being a marching band fan?

Yes! Here are a few things to remember:

1. Please do not enter or exit the stands while a band is performing. If you need to enter or exit, do so while the band is setting up their equipment or exiting the field.
2. Show your support by applauding and cheering all the students, regardless of school. All of the students have worked hard and are excited to perform for an audience that appreciates what they do. Please refrain from making any disparaging remarks about other schools, students, or performances. (This seems obvious, but you’d be surprised how even the most well-intentioned people can get caught up in the heat of competition and make hurtful remarks!)
3. Noisemakers (ex. Cow bells, shakers) are fine before and after a performance, but please do not use them during the performance. They may distract the performers and could even affect a band’s score if the judge is unable to hear the music. Please NO AIRHORNS at any time. Cheering and applause are fine during a performance and may be especially appropriate after a solo or when the band achieves a particularly striking effect.

4. Please do not talk during performances. Turn phones to a silent setting. You would be upset if you missed your child’s performance because the people sitting nearby were chatting, answering phones or otherwise making distracting noises. Please be respectful of others’ desire to see their child perform. Hopefully they will be respectful of you, too!

5. Keep in mind that marching band is about putting forth your best performance. It is not about beating another band, winning a trophy or getting a certain score. It’s ok to be excited if the band improves their score or wins a certain award; but ultimately we hope the students feel a sense of accomplishment that comes from the heart, not from a trophy.

I see my child warming up in the parking lot. Is this a good time to say hello?

Sorry, but no. Students have specific instructions about what to do when they arrive at the show, and your arrival may put them into conflict with those instructions. It puts the students in an awkward position if their instructor is telling them one thing and then their parent arrives and tells them to do something different. The staff asks that you respect the following guidelines:

1. Please do not try to talk to your child until after the performance unless you have a very serious situation that absolutely cannot wait. If this is the case, please approach the director or staff person first so that they can help you to work through this situation with your child.

2. Please do not give your child food or drink before the performance. This can get clogged in their instrument and muddy its sound. (Not to mention, it’s pretty unsanitary. Yuck!) There will be time for them to meet you after the performance or visit the concession stand. They will also be given time to eat before arriving at the show. Don’t worry too much about finding your child after the performance. They usually have an uncanny ability to find you when they need money for the concession stand! If you wear your “Pride Wear” and sit with other MHS fans, it will make it even easier for them to find you. You can also designate a particular meeting area, such as the concession stand, for after the performance.

3. Please do not interrupt the warm up unless you have an emergency. The students and staff need to focus. If you have specific, non-emergency concerns and need to speak to Mr. Shearer or a staff member, this is not the best time. They would be happy to speak with you after the performance or arrange an alternate meeting.

4. The best things you can do before the show is find a seat and cheer!

What happens at the end of the show?

After the last performance, the drum majors/representatives from each band will line up and march down the field. This is called a Retreat or Awards Ceremony. Scores and awards will be presented and students will return to the bus. At this time, directors and staff are invited to meet with the judges to discuss ways to improve their performance. This meeting is called “Critique.”
The show is over, why hasn't the bus left yet?

The most likely reason is that the staff is still at Critique. Groups meet with the judges in the order that they performed. Please be patient. The staff is as anxious to get home as you are!

The bus just got back to school. Why can't my child leave yet?

Students are responsible for unloading and properly storing all equipment, even if they do not personally use it. If we work together this process won’t take long and everyone can go home. Also, please be aware that students are expected to leave the school or be picked up within 15 minutes of returning from a competition or at the end of any band activity.

Circuit Information

There are several circuits for competitive marching bands in our area. The most common are Tournament of Bands (TOB) and USBands, our preferred circuit. Occasionally, there are also shows in the Mid-Atlantic region sponsored by Bands of America (BOA), but this circuit is more active in the Mid-West. Information about these circuits can be found at:

- TOB www.tob.org
- USBands www.yea.org
- BOA www.bands.org

Mr. Shearer and the staff will assess Middletown’s needs each year to determine the best possible circuit for competition based upon: distance of travel, budget concerns, appeal of performing venues, consistency and helpfulness of adjudicators, and level of competition. Marching band is an educational experience, so we want to have a healthy mix of great places to perform, positive critique experiences, appreciative audiences and reasonable travel. For 2017, we will be competing in USBands as well as an independent competition at James Madison University. See the website and online band calendar for specific show dates and times.

How are bands divided into competitive brackets?

Competitive brackets are determined by dividing bands into categories based on size. USBands assigns brackets based on band size. BOA assigns brackets based on overall school size. There are pros and cons to each system. The smallest groups are considered Group I, and each successive group contains larger and larger bands or schools. By size, Middletown is considered a Group III or IV band. In USBands, we will compete as an “A” band. “A” class designates bands that are less competitive. USBands also has an “Open” class which designates bands that are more competitive and put a lot more money into show design and band staff.

How are the bands scored?

Each circuit has its own approved scoring system, but in general the judges are looking for proficiency in music, visual and overall effect. Judges are assigned to critique Individual Music performance, Ensemble Music performance, Visual Effect, Overall Effect of Music, and Overall Effect of Visual. Within each of these categories, judges are assessing the show design, musical composition, difficulty level, quality of technique, musicianship, and how effectively the
performers portray the show concept through their playing, marching and guard work. The best shows are those that are both challenging and well performed. Each circuit has its own formula for adding up scores in the various categories to assign an overall score out of 100. Specific scoring rubrics are available on the TOB, USBands and BOA websites.

Is it better to perform an easy show perfectly or a difficult show pretty well?

Different circuits have different philosophies about this. Generally, USBands judges reward achievement. What you actually do correctly will earn more credit that something that you attempt but fail to achieve. So in theory, an easy, clean show would be scored higher than a difficult, dirty show. However, the bands that achieve very difficult skills will earn more points than bands that achieve easy ones. So by the end of the year, when all the bands have had time to clean and perfect their shows, you will start to see that the groups with more difficult music, drill, and guard work are rising to the top of the standings over the groups with easier shows. (Keep in mind it’s a subjective activity, so there is some gray area here!)

Why don’t they give credit for attempting difficult skills even if they aren’t done perfectly?

Many times they do give credit, but they can’t give full credit to something that is imperfectly performed. The job of the staff is to design a show that is both challenging and achievable for their students. The closer they are to achieving it perfectly, the more credit they will receive. It does happen sometimes that a band will be out there trying to perform work that is just too difficult for them.

What are caption awards?

The host has the option of presenting awards to the best performers in various categories (called captions), such as best music or visual performance, best color guard, best percussion, etc. The performances of the dance line, percussion section, drum major and other captions affect the overall visual and musical scores, but there are also separate judges who look at these areas completely apart from the overall band’s performance. The scores given by these judges are used to decide who wins a caption award and do not factor into the band’s overall score.

I thought the students did a great job. Why wasn’t their score higher?

The students probably did do a great job. The most important thing is that they feel good about their performance and know that they did their best. The judges are professionally trained to look for specific skills that an untrained spectator may not even notice. Tiny discrepancies in marching technique, difficulty level and musical proficiency can make a big difference in score, but might be totally unnoticed by the fans. Judging is fairly subjective, too. Sometimes a judge may simply prefer a different style. Please remember that the most important thing is that our students push themselves to reach their highest potential. In the end, a score is just a number and a trophy is just a piece of plastic. Both are soon forgotten, but hard work, perseverance and pride of accomplishment are lessons for a lifetime! The staff’s opinion of the performance is usually based on what was improved from the previous week. The staff knows where the mistakes are, where improvements need to be made, and where the band may not be achieving at their potential. We are in tune with all those moments during the performance, and it is when the students hit those spots that we are proud!
What influence do scores from a previous competition have on the current competition? (i.e. Do “legacy” bands have a little more “grace” in scoring?)

In theory, previous scores have no influence. Each show is individually scored. Judges evaluate what is currently happening, without regard to the band’s prior achievements or reputation. There are plenty of anecdotes that bands with a strong tradition of success may be given the benefit of the doubt over newer bands, but judges are trained to avoid this. Judges are human, too. They do their best to be unbiased, but in some cases they would have to be living under a rock to avoid knowing a certain band’s reputation. USBands does a very good job of moving their judges around so it is rare for a single judge to see our band more than once or twice throughout the season.

What are the judges looking for exactly?

They are looking for all sorts of things! Here’s a summary of what the judges in different categories are looking for:

**Musically**
- Is it in tune all the time?
- Are individuals playing their parts or faking it?
- Are they playing in the correct style with correct technique?
- Are the notes articulated correctly?
- Dynamics - are the changes in loud and soft appropriate and played with control?
- Are rhythms played accurately?
- Is the timing right? Are the parts lined up together?
- Is it played musically and with expression?
- Balance - Can you hear all the instruments in balance or are a few sticking out? Is one section overpowering the others?
- Is there a variety of styles, sounds & dynamic contrasts or is does everything sound the same?
- Do they play with confidence, intensity and showmanship?
- Does the music coordinate well with the visual?
- Does the band have the stamina to perform all the music perfectly all the way through the show?

**Visually**
- Are they marching in step? (All the left feet move together, etc.)
- Do they have good posture?
- Are they using the same marching technique? They should be “walking” the same way, with toes pointed upwards and feet striking the ground at the same angle.
- Do they use a variety of step sizes? Do they march at a variety of tempos?
- How clean is the drill? Are they locking into recognizable lines and forms or do they never quite get there?
- When they are moving at high speeds are they able to maintain strong posture & technique?
- Do they move with confidence and control?
- Does the visual design enhance the music? Does it create a variety of emotions and evoke a reaction from the audience?
- Do the drill, guard work and music fit together?
- Is the show imaginative?
- Does the guard use a variety of equipment, techniques and styles?
Do the flags and costumes fit the theme and add to the visual effect?
Does the guard perform with uniform technique? Are they spinning together?
Are the performers focused? Do they maintain intensity and stay “in character” the whole time?

How important are the Percussion and Dance line? Why do they receive separate scores?

The entire percussion section and dance line are extremely important. On its own, the wind section can achieve some wonderful musical and visual moments, but adding percussion and dance line helps to push these moments to the max. Percussion and dance line do factor into the overall scores. They may also receive separate scores mostly for bragging rights and because the skills associated with these sections are specialized and different from what the rest of the band is doing. (Fun Fact! In many instances, the drum line sets the tempo, not the drum major. The band listens to the drum line in order to feel the pulse of the music and stay in time, thus allowing the sound to reach the audience at the same time.)

Is there a specific number score that is given for a certain skill? (i.e. does the overall score come from accumulating points for achieving certain skills?)

There is no master list of specific skills that hold certain point values. In USBands, the judges have 5 ranges of numbers, called boxes, which are something like letter grades at school. Box I would be like a grade of F and Box V would be an A. Within each of the boxes there is a range of numbers. Each judge in each category has an assigned list of skills and concepts that he/she is looking for. Then the judge evaluates whether those particular areas are performed at the level of Box V, IV, III, etc. (or grade A, B, C, etc.), and chooses which number score to assign based on the range of numbers in the given box. This is similar to the way a teacher must evaluate a test and think “Is it worth a high A such as a 97 or a low A, such as a 92?” In USBands, the boxes are on a sliding system, meaning that the range of numbers within each box changes as the season progresses. This makes it more difficult to achieve Box V as the season progresses. In other words, in September the teacher gives a grade of A to any student who earns a 90-100. But in November, the same student would have to earn a 95-100 to be given a grade of A.

What is Bands of America (BOA)?

Bands of America is the “marching” branch of Music for All, a national organization that promotes music education. Its headquarters are in Indianapolis, where it sponsors its own Grand National Championships each year. BOA sponsors 2-3 regional competitions each weekend in various parts of the country. These competitions cater to the most elite marching bands in the country— many of them are huge Midwestern and Texas powerhouses. In the past, the competition at Towson University has drawn bands from Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, New Jersey and even Utah!
How is BOA similar to USBands/TOB?

- Bands perform their field shows and are judged by a panel of people who look for musical, visual and overall excellence.
- Parents, friends and fans are encouraged to come and cheer on their favorite bands and enjoy the show.
- All of the young people involved work hard and love performing.
- There will be some very entertaining and excellent performances.

How is BOA different from USBands/TOB?

- BOA competitions have two parts. All the bands perform in a preliminary competition (Prelims) in the morning or afternoon.
- The top ten are invited back for Finals in the evening. Scores are not announced, just the names of the finalists. It is considered a great accomplishment just to qualify for Finals.
- The bands are divided into group sizes based on school size, rather than band size. Middletown is considered an AA band, based on the number of students enrolled in the school in grades 10-12.
- BOA has three group sizes instead of the 4-6 we have seen from our local circuit. The smallest schools are A, and the largest are AAA. However, the sizes of the bands from schools in the same group category could vary greatly. Most of the bands will be larger than ours.
- Performance order is determined by random draw. All the group sizes are mixed together and compete against each other for an overall placement. BOA does not announce the group sizes before each band performs. Their philosophy is that the group size should not matter and they do not want anyone to be influenced by group size when evaluating the band. Having all the bands compete against each other, regardless of size, makes for a highly competitive contest.
- The caliber of bands that choose to participate in BOA is usually very high. Some of the best bands on the east coast (and the nation!) will be there. We would love to be in the elite company that qualifies for Finals; but even if we don’t, we can certainly learn a lot by watching those who do.
- Separate tickets are required for Prelims and Finals or you can purchase a day pass which is good for both. Since this is our first time in BOA, we are learning the ropes about the tickets. Watch for info coming soon about whether to buy through Middletown or at the gate.

Championships

What is USBands National Championships?

The prestigious USBands National Championships are the highest level of competition in USBands. The format is similar to Northern States but the idea is that only the very best bands from throughout the USBands circuit will be invited to perform. In addition to crowning a champion in each of the size categories, there will also be a Grand Champion—the band with the highest overall score regardless of group size.
GLOSSARY

**Auxiliary (Color Guard):** also known as the Dance Line in the Marching Knights, this group creates much of the visual expression of the show through dance and the use of equipment such as flags, rifles and sabers. Most other bands refer to auxiliary as the Color Guard.

**Battery:** refers to the marching percussion, including snare, tenor and bass drums.

**Clean:** means that the students make few mistakes in their marching, playing, or spinning during the show. For example, if ten snare drummers are playing their parts cleanly, it should sound as if just one person is playing.

**Critique:** a meeting after each competition that allows judges and staff members to discuss ways of improving the performance

**Dirty:** means that the basic elements of the show are present, but the students have not practiced enough to perform them with the precision that is needed. For example, if ten snare drummers are playing the same dirty part, it means that you will be able to hear each individual player and know that the notes are not totally in sync with each other.

**Drill:** refers to the positions of the band and dance line on the field and the steps that they take to create visual designs.

**Gauntlets:** refer to the part of the uniform that goes around the musicians wrists.

**Pit/Front Ensemble:** refers to the grounded percussion in front of the marching band, and includes instruments such as timpani, gongs, and keyboard instruments (marimba, vibraphone, xylophone, bells, and chimes).

**Pit Crew:** Parent volunteers who help load and transport percussion equipment. They also have the important job of moving this equipment on and off the field for performances.

**Retreat/Awards:** at the end of the competition, the bands or drum majors take the field to accept awards.

**Shako:** refers to the style of head gear that is worn by the MHS marching band.

**Show:** refers to both the theme and performance of a particular band or to a competition.

**Spinning:** this term describes the use of dance line equipment, such as flags, rifles, and sabers. We don’t call it twirling.

**Techs:** Staff members who assist with percussion, dance line, music and visual aspects of the show.