

THE AMERICAN BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

Position Paper on School Bands

Over the course of the past twenty years, three of the most influential and respected organizations in American music education – the National Band Association, the Music Educators National Conference (now: NAFME), and The American Bandmasters Association – have delivered position statements on the importance of artistic approaches to the school band programs in the United States. These position papers were created in part as a response to the over-emphasis and rampant abuse of competition in many high school band programs, and they are now more important than ever in view of the current national emphasis on assessment. The three associations seek to curb those abuses and re-focus high school band programs toward artistic and curricular goals. The problem is not marching band competition *per se*, which can motivate students to reach higher standards; in fact, the bands that are highly successful in competition are sometimes among the best in the concert band field.

The National Band Association authored a position paper in which it is stressed that: "the basic objective of instrumental music education is for students to learn performance skills in order to understand the musical language and to experience the joys of recreating music in the expressive medium of their choice." The Music Educators National Conference helped to develop national standards for band programs that have been accepted by the United States Department of Education. It is music education and not competition that enhances lifelong learning and enjoyment.

The American Bandmasters Association elects to its membership the leading conductors and composers of wind band music in North America. The ABA adopted a position paper on School Band Programs at its 54th Convention in 1988. Due to the proliferation and abuse of competition especially in the marching band area, there is a need to revisit that position. The following is from the 1988 statement by The American Bandmasters Association: *Music, as performed by school bands, must have an artistic function. As such, it graces the participants with ideals and sensitivities that are crucial to human existence and progress. . . . Administrators and parents need to be aware that the primary role of the American band program is the artistic realization of musical expression with all its accompanying cognitive and affective value. A balanced band program with the concert band as the central focus--the primary activity--must be the concern of every band director/teacher in the nation. With concerted effort to accomplish this objective, the vital artistic/academic mission of the multi-dimensional American band program will be realized, and society will reap the benefits.*

It is, therefore, the responsibility of band directors and school administrators to strive toward the highest levels of curricular and artistic goals for all students who participate in instrumental music education. The educational and artistic value of instrumental music must always be the dominant purpose.