

# Rulebook

Last updated February 2026

## Our Mission Statement

The New Jersey Marching Band Directors Association (NJMBDA) is a volunteer organization providing performance opportunities for all New Jersey marching bands, governed and facilitated by participating directors. We seek to expose all marching bands to the highest level of musical/visual adjudication, that ultimately fosters educational growth for our students, staff, and community at large. We fervently believe that all bands, regardless of size, budget, and resources, deserve the best possible performance and judging experiences. We are whole-heartedly committed to fiscal responsibility, as we keep requisite fees low, while simultaneously providing an infrastructure where host bands can have a successful fundraising experience.

## General Regulations, Definitions, and Contest Management for NJMBDA Affiliated Shows

### Summary of Penalties

Penalties will be assessed for:

- a) Under 6-minute performance time: 0.1 point for every 3 seconds under time. This timing penalty only goes into effect in the month of October and will not be enforced in September.
- b) Penalty for delay of contest: 0.5 points for every minute of delay up to 10 points
- c) Performer violation (*see section 4.0*): 3 point total penalty regardless of number of infractions
- d) Electronic Violation (*see section 6.0*): 3 point total penalty regardless of number of infractions

*Additional penalties that may include disqualification are outlined in Sections 1.0-9.0 of this document.*

### 1.0 School and Member Eligibility

NJMBDA defines an eligible high school band as one in which:

- a) A high school or secondary institution from the state of New Jersey.
- b) All participating members are registered at the same high school.
- c) Students from all district and/or feeder district elementary, junior high, middle, and partner vocational schools are eligible.

Note: All members/performers who contribute to the performance MUST be students.

*Penalty: Violation of the eligibility rule may result in disqualification.*

## 2.0 Member Requirements

- a) There will be a yearly participation fee for all participating ensembles. The fee will be determined by the executive board on an annual basis.
- b) All first-year members participating in 2 or more NJMBDA shows must post a one-time \$200.00 Participant Bond.
  - i) This bond is refundable upon dissolution of the ensemble/termination of NJMBDA membership.
  - ii) Requests for return of the bond must be made in writing to the Executive Board.
  - iii) All member ensembles have three (3) years from their last active season to request their bond be returned to them, or it will be forfeited to NJMBDA. If, after 3 years, the ensemble chooses to re-join NJMBDA, they will have to repay their bond.
  - iv) This bond is to be paid once. If an ensemble continues membership beyond one year the bond will be held and does not need to be paid again.
  - v) Schools withdrawing from a show within 14 days of an event are required to provide documentation from school administration of excessive hardship preventing the ensemble from attending the event. Failure to do so can result in the removal of the school's bond, which would then need to be replenished for participation in future events.
  - vi) The NJMBDA executive board has the ability to make all final decisions regarding member requirements above.
- c) A member ensemble must attend one NJMBDA sponsored local contest to be eligible for NJMBDA Class State Championships.
  - i) There will be an additional fee for participation in the Garden State Cup State Championship event. The fee will be determined by the executive board on an annual basis.

## 3.0 Classification and Performance Order

- a) There will be Five (5) classes of performance at all NJMBDA events. Class size is determined by the total number of student performers (this includes all Drum Majors and Color Guard & presupposes any student who contributes to the program musically or visually). The executive board, in tandem with the classification committee, will REVIEW ensemble number submissions in June to determine the breakdown of class for the upcoming season with the intent of creating four equally distributed classes across the entire membership. Finalized classes will be communicated to member directors via email before the end of June. Final ensemble numbers will be collected in August, then ensembles will be appropriately classified.
  - "Class 1"
  - "Class 2"
  - "Class 3"
  - "Class 4"
  - **Festival Class (performing for comments only)**
- b) Groups will perform in size order (1, 2, 3, 4), and ensemble specific performance order within class will be determined by random draw. Host bands will perform last. It is the host's decision to hold one OR two award ceremonies.

#### 4.0 Performers

- a) All aspects of the Field Show “Performance” (i.e. music, narration, sound effects, lighting, special effects, etc.) must be performed/initiated by students. Any aspect of the performance (including but not limited to playback devices such as MP3, CD, synthesizer, computer, sound pad, etc.) must be initiated by a student within the “Performance Field”. No adult activity during the Performance may contribute directly to the musical or visual program.
- b) Performers can be any student within their school music program that is in good standing as determined by each school’s policies.

Exceptions include:

- ii) Adults used during a performance when potential dangerous weather situations occur.
- iii) Adults may set up and take down equipment before and after the performance.
- iv) Adults may provide assistance when a band member becomes ill or injured during a performance. In these situations, students may be assisted from the field by a staff member, emergency technician, parent, or NJMBDA official without any penalty.
- v) Adults may assist with the volume and balance of electronic equipment. Please see section 6.e

*Penalty: 3-point penalty regardless of the number of infractions or at the discretion of the Chief Judge, up to and including disqualification.*

#### 5.0 Performance Procedures

- a) Each participating band will have 15 minutes to enter, set-up, warm-up, perform, and exit the performance area.
- b) Within those 15 minutes, bands will be given the first 4 minutes for set-up/warm-up time.
- c) Pre-recorded (or sequenced) and/or live music may be used for a “pre-show” within the 4-minute setup/warm-up time. Pre-recorded music must cease by the completion of the pre-show announcement.
- d) At three (3) minutes, thirty (30) seconds, the timing official will cue the introductory announcement below. (The announcement may be cued earlier if official is given direction by the Drum Major or Director.)

***“Joining us from [School City & State], please welcome the [School] Marching Band!”***

*(Announcer pauses for audience response)*

***“[School]’s musical selections include the following:”***

*(Announcer reads their selections)*

***“The New Jersey Marching Band Directors Association and the [name of host school] are proud to present in (competition/festival) performance, Drum Major(s) [Drum Major(s) name(s)] and the [School “nickname”].”\****

\*If the band’s Drum Major is going to salute, it should occur as the (or after) the announcer is reading/announcing the final sentence above. However, a Drum Major salute is not necessary to indicate the band is ready to start.

\*The performance of a pre-show during the four minute set-up/warm-up time or any other on-field activity will not alter the time of the announcement or the timing of the performance.

- e) Bands must present a performance of no less than 6 minutes and no more than 11 minutes.  
The beginning of the show is to be defined as the first note or the first movement  
FOLLOWING the conclusion of the introductory announcement. Performance timing and adjudication will end with the last note played or last step taken.  
Musical exits will be included in the performance time.
- f) Bands must completely vacate the performance area within the 15-minute total time.
- g) Trooping the home stands entering or exiting the stadium is not allowed at NJMBDA events.

*Penalties: A penalty for delay of contest will be 0.5 points for every minute of delay up to 10 points. At local events, Show Coordinators are responsible for reporting timing penalties, and the assigned Lead Judge, after consulting an NJMBDA Board Member, is responsible for enforcing it. At NJMBDA State Championships, an adjudicator will be assigned as the "Timing & Penalty Judge " and will enforce any penalties at that event.*

## **6.0 Electronics**

- a) All music from traditional wind, percussion, string or electronic instruments must be performed by a student(s) live and in real time with the student(s) present and performing at the time of the performance.
- b) The triggering of (performing with) electronic music, sound effects, voiceovers, any/all lighting effects, and/or visual items (e.g. "remote control"), is only permissible by a student performer who is within field boundaries. Adults may provide direction to student operators of such equipment, so long as they remain outside of the Performance Field.
- c) Music must either be performed "live and in real time" or prerecorded or sequenced for playback on a "one stroke, one note" basis. Tempo-specific samples and musical loops are not permitted during the performance.
- d) Non-music sounds such as narration or sound effects may be performed either through its live performance or through the playback of the recorded sound.
- e) A Student running a mixing board or wireless mixing device (i.e. balancing wireless microphones, etc.) may be located outside the boundaries of the Performance Field without penalty. An adult may operate a mixing board or wireless mixing device, ONLY for the purpose of managing volumes and balances. They must do so from outside the boundaries of the Performance Field. Please note that allowing an adult to operate a soundboard does not grant permission for them to "contribute directly to the music or visual program."

*Penalty: 3-point penalty regardless of the number of infractions or at the discretion of the Chief Judge, up to and including disqualification.*

## 7.0 Copyright Requirements

- a) NJMBDA requires enrolled bands to comply with all copyright laws regarding performance and/or arrangements of copyrighted music, visual images and other materials, as well as the use of copyrighted audio text, and the display of copyrighted words and images. Copyright is a federal system that creates a set of rights and protections for original works of authorship or creation. The protection extends to literary works, musical works, dramatic works, compilations, computer programs, choreographic works, graphic works, sculptural works, audio-visual works – in short, any creative work that is fixed in a manner that can be perceived by human eyes or ears, or through machines. Protected are (1) the right to reproduce the work, (2) the right to perform the work publicly, (3) the right to display the work publicly, (4) the right to create new works based on or derived from the work and (5) the right to initially distribute the work, and (6) the right to digitally transmit sound recordings of the work.
- b) It is the duty of the director and school to adhere to copyright laws and requirements.

*Penalty: For Copyright Infringement – Disqualification. Participants who fail to comply with or knowingly violate copyright law may be penalized up to and including disqualification.*

## 8.0 Equipment & Restrictions

- a) Off-road mechanized vehicles (defined as golf carts, garden tractors, All-Terrain Vehicles, etc.) will be allowed to pull equipment trailers for set up and take down unless prohibited by an individual site. A protective bib must be rigged underneath the vehicle so no fluids drop to the turf or carpet. Pick-up trucks or smaller vehicles are not permitted. The participating band and its school district are liable and will be held responsible for any damage to a performance area or venue caused by violation of these policies and/or actions of the operators generally.
- b) The following are NOT ALLOWED in a Performance or on the Performance Field:
  - Any equipment, object, or material (including, but not limited to: debris, powder, water, or other liquids) that may cause damage to the Performance Field or Performance Area, that presents a safety hazard, or that disrupts the scheduled flow of the contest.
  - Pyrotechnics of any kind, including fire, fireworks, or the discharge of arms.
  - Animals
  - Off-road mechanized vehicles (defined as golf carts, garden tractors, small ATVs, etc.)
  - Drones or any remote-controlled helicopter, aircraft, or similar items
  - Hazardous equipment or illegal use of equipment
- c) Hash marks will differ from stadium to stadium. While Performance Fields at all events will have cross hash marks at 53'4" from each sideline (dividing the field into equal thirds), some facilities may have additional sets of marks including cross hash marks at 60' from each sideline (collegiate) and/or hash marks at 70'9" from each sideline (professional). Vertical yard line tick marks (marking each yard) may also be present along front and back field sidelines and along the line(s) created by cross hash marks. Pre-event communications will have specific information regarding hash marks on the respective field of each championship event.

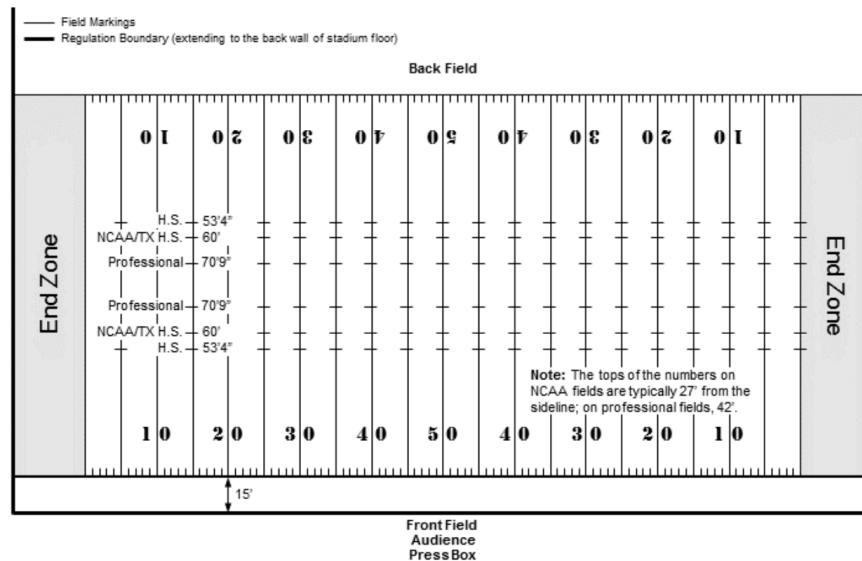


Figure 1: Performance Field Diagram

- d) Because NJMBDA is a guest at our host stadiums, any concerns expressed by the stadium management will be addressed and must be acted upon by the band in question.
- e) Bands are financially responsible for damage to any part of the stadium, parking areas, warm-up areas or any of the facilities used by the NJMBDA to host the event.
- f) Props and Equipment: All props and equipment must be designed and be of a quantity so as they may be brought into the Performance Field from the band entrance gate.
- g) While the physical parameters of stadiums remain the same generally, some variation of stadium floors, access and egress may exist. NJMBDA (through the Show Coordinator and/or the Chief Judge) will invoke procedures and methods of contest operation specifically intended to ensure the safe, fair, smooth and consistent operation of shows. Such procedures will be developed as needed, and the Show Coordinator or Chief Judge shall always have the full or final discretion and authority to modify these procedures as he/she shall determine to be in the best interests of the show and its participants.
- h) Any instrument or piece of equipment wheeled onto the field surface, including and surrounding the performance field must have pneumatic-like tires. Non-conforming equipment may be penalized (per piece of equipment) and/or may be prohibited from entering the performance field. Any instrument or equipment may be carried onto and off the performance field, given the condition that they are not moved (wheeled) once placed on the field.

*Penalty – For rule(s) violation and/or failure to comply with venue directions, penalties will be determined at the discretion of the Show Coordinator or Chief Judge - up to and including disqualification.*

Note: Directors are encouraged to contact NJMBDA to inquire about the use of specific equipment or materials when its permissibility under this section or at a specific site may be in question.

## 9.0 General Conduct / Conditions

*The New Jersey Marching Band Directors Association is fervently committed to cultivating a culture that is egalitarian, professional, and supportive to advance music education through the marching arts.*

- a) Directors/Staff members may contact the Chief Judge or the NJMBDA Show Coordinator at any time with questions or concerns not related to judges scores or commentary.
- b) No directors or representatives of competing bands may be in the press box or adjudication areas during a contest event. (Show sponsors may provide an area for a staff member to take an “educational use only” video.)
- c) Any comment(s) regarding scoring or judge’s commentary are to be directed to the Judging Coordinator upon completion of the NJMBDA event. Comments can be emailed to [judging@njmarching.org](mailto:judging@njmarching.org).
- d) Any delay of contest, improper conduct, or infraction for which no specific rule or penalty is given may be grounds for warning or penalty at the discretion of the Chief Judge. The Chief Judge may issue warnings and/or penalties for behaviors contrary to the NJMBDA mission and values.
- e) Actions that violate the principles of professional behavior representative of NJMBDA including, but not limited to:
  - Warm-up on-site: any component of a band in areas and/or at times other than those designated which may bleed into the performance area.
  - Overstaying in warm-up areas that intrude into the time and space of other participants or delay the performance timing of the contest.
  - Behaviors that compromise the safety of participants and others and/or violate known stadium policies.
  - Language and behavior (on and off the field by students, staff and/or other badge/pass holders) that are generally disrespectful and contrary to the mission or core values of NJMBDA.
- f) Canceled/postponed shows: NJMBDA will not be liable for any traveling costs associated with any delays or cancellations of contests. Rain contingency plans will be communicated to directors in advance and will be specific to each contest site based on facility capability and availability.

NOTE: In the event of a cancellation of State Championships, all qualifying bands will forfeit their entry fees. The entry fee money will pay for all the expenditures associated with the contest.
- g) Unauthorized duplication of NJMBDA documentation (staff passes, bus/equipment truck passes, etc.) by a director, staff member, or parent of a participating band may result in penalties to the band, loss of privileges, and/or revocation of credentials as per the Executive Board.
- h) It is the responsibility of all member directors and ensembles to maintain a professional, educational, and respectful environment throughout the contest. Directors are responsible for ensuring appropriate etiquette of their students on and off the field.
- i) Show hosts are responsible for maintaining a respectful atmosphere amongst spectators during all band performances.
- j) Use of the National Colors is optional, and care should be taken for proper flag etiquette. Please refer to <https://www.usa.gov/flag> for more information.

*Penalty: At the discretion of the Chief Judge up to disqualification*

## 10.0 Local Contest Format

- a) Cost of spectator admission for all local NJMBDA sponsored events will be \$15 for adults, \$10 for students/seniors, and free for children under the age of 4.
- b) All NJMBDA local shows will have the following class (1, 2, 3, 4) and Class Caption awards:
  - Best Music
  - Best Effect
  - Best Visual
- c) Additionally, an Overall Grand Champion will be presented at each show along with the following *Overall* Caption awards:
  - Best Overall Music
  - Best Overall Effect
  - Best Overall Visual
- d) No awards will be given for Best Percussion or Color Guard
- e) Retreat will be Drum Majors only at all NJMBDA local sponsored events.

## 11.0 Class State Championship Format

- a) Class State Championships will take place one week prior to the *Garden State Cup Championships*.
- b) There will be no additional cost to participate in this event beyond the season participation fee.
- c) Cost of spectator admission will be determined by the Executive Board.
- d) Awards will be given to all participating ensembles by NJMBDA. Class champion awards will be given for classes 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- e) No Best Color Guard or Best Percussion awards will be given at NJMBDA Class State Championships.
- f) No overall grand champion will be awarded at NJMBDA Class State Championships
- g) Retreat will be for Drum Majors only at NJMBDA Class State Championships.
- h) Performance order will be determined by random draw within classes.

## 12.0 Garden State Cup Championship Format

- a) Cost for member ensembles to participate in NJMBDA State Championships will be determined by the Executive Board in tandem with costs of the host site.
- b) Bands must compete in the *Class Championship* event to be eligible for the *Garden State Cup Championship* events.
- c) This event will consist of two separate events: *Open Class Championships* and *A Class Championships*. Where groups perform will be determined by placement and/or score from the *Class State Championships* from the prior weekend.
- d) **Open Class State Championships (TCNJ Evening Event)**
  - i) 15 ensembles based on scores/placement from *Class State Championships*.
    - Top (2) placing bands from each class (1, 2, 3, 4).
    - Next (7) highest scoring bands, regardless of class.
  - ii) Performance order will be based on scores from *Class State Championships* with a random draw being performed within these scoring groups: 1-5, 6-10, 11-15.
  - iii) Bands will not perform within group size classes. Placements will be awarded for places 1-15.

- iv) Overall caption awards in the captions of Visual, Music, and Overall Effect will be awarded.
  - v) The highest scoring band will be named the NJMBDA Open Class State Champion and will receive the *Garden State Cup*, a traveling trophy to be returned at the *Class State Championship* event the following year.
- e) **A-Class State Championships (TCNJ Morning Event)**
- i) All Ensembles that did not qualify for the *Open Class Championship* will perform in this event.
  - ii) Ensembles will compete within group size classes (1A, 2A, 3A, 4A)
  - iii) Performance order will be determined by a random draw, separated into top-scoring and lower-scoring halves within each class, based on the previous weekend's results.
  - iv) Four "*A-Class State Champions*" will be awarded.
  - v) Caption awards will be awarded for Visual, Music and Overall Effect within each class.
  - vi) No overall grand champion will be awarded at this event.
  - vii) Retreat will be for Drum Majors only at NJMBDA *A-Class State Championships*.

## 1.0 Glossary of Important Terms

- a) *Performance*: The musical and visual program presented for adjudication.
- b) *Performance Field*: The regulation size football field with end zones and including the area from out-of-bounds lines on the ends to fifteen (15) feet (when the facilities allow) in front of the front side line (360 feet long) and from the out of-bounds lines on the ends to the back limit of the stadium surface, normally the back grandstand or wall. The boundaries of the field will be marked and the field will be lined every five yards. (*see figure 1 in section 8.c*)
- c) *Boundary Lines*: These are included as part of the Performance Field. Stepping on a boundary line does not constitute a violation. The crossing of these lines, defined as one entire foot of a performer placed beyond the boundary, will constitute a boundary violation. Boundary rules apply only to a performer's body, specifically feet. Equipment and instruments can be placed, utilized, and retrieved from outside the boundary lines, so long as the performer's feet remain inside the boundary.
- d) *Spectator Area*: The seating areas and aisles of the stadium.
- e) *Penalty*: A deduction of 0.1 from the total score assessed for a rule infraction. Various infractions have different penalties.
- f) *One Stroke, One Note*: The production of music using any device, provided each individual note is produced by a separate trigger ("stroke") by a student.
- g) *Drum Major*: A primary student conductor or another performing students conducting for a limited period during a performance.
- h) *Electronic Instrument*: Any electronic device or component that produces and/or amplifies sound
- i) *Live and in Real Time*: Performance on the field through the traditional use of a musical instrument (including the voice) or electronically on a "one stroke, one note" basis.
- j) *Music*: Organized sound, having the elements of rhythm, harmony and melody through time/space.
- k) *Prerecorded Music*: Music in any form (single or multiple voices and/or instruments) previously taken directly or indirectly from a live source (including amateur or professional performance).

- l) *Prop*: Any item used primarily or solely for visual effect during the performance. Examples of props include, but are not limited to, backdrops, flats, stages, risers, tarps, banners, etc.
- m) *Sample*: Any captured sound that can be triggered on an electronic instrument.
- n) *Sequenced Music*: Music pre-constructed from one or more electronic sources (including audio samples, synthesizers, etc.). Prerecorded and sequenced music are treated identically in the rules.
- o) *Sound Effect*: All sounds other than music or spoken text, e.g. the sound of twisting metal, falling rain, etc. Permission must be obtained for use of any copyrighted material.
- p) *Spectator Area*: The seating areas and aisles; generally, the entire stadium other than the Performance Area.
- q) *Student*: A person currently enrolled in a high school or a lower grade school or educational environment, as permitted by state law and/or school policy.
- r) *Tempo-Specific Sample*: Any sample from which tempo, through rhythmic intent, can be derived relative to the moment. This includes sequenced music, looping, and sustained effects with rhythmic intent. Tempo-Specific samples and musical loops are not permitted during the Performance.

**More information can be found at [www.njmarching.org](http://www.njmarching.org)**