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Gregory-Portland Independent School District

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G-P Middle School Band Director's Rhythm Teaching Method to be featured at Texas Music Educator's Association (TMEA) Conference

With 70 sixth graders on the edge of their seats, Assistant Band Director Ryan Sanders begins their daily practice routine ... by walking away. A projector comes alive in front of the group, and a cursor begins to jump across the screen as first-year band students at G-P Middle School follow along to complex rhythm patterns and, essentially, lead themselves.

"Teaching rhythm is one of the most challenging parts of instructing young musicians, and helping them to be confident enough to play well on their own is one of our main objectives," said Sanders. "So, I developed a system to help them master rhythm patterns in a fun and competitive way. We do all the ground work and create the (lessons) – then, they follow along as a group." Students are not only developing good rhythm techniques, Sanders said, they're also becoming better sight-readers and listening to the band as a whole instead of only themselves. "They are learning together and owning it."

Jeremy Anderson, G-PMS Head Band Director, develops customized music charts that students follow during practice, and they are uploaded into a program designed for music education: SmartMusic. It's this program that allows the lessons to "come to life" on screen, and give students the chance to follow along without a band director guiding them through every beat.

"(Sanders) wrote an article about the teaching process that was featured in the SmartMusic blog this year, and it's received quite a bit of interest," said Anderson. "We didn't realize at first just how successful the method would be ... until other educators started asking what we were doing, and wanted charts and lessons to use in their own band programs." The interest that followed came not only from these colleagues, but also the Texas Music Educator's Association (TMEA). This teaching method will be presented at their annual conference in February, where more than 29,000 musicians and educators from across the nation will gather to learn about the brightest ideas and innovations in their field.

"The curriculum Mr. Sanders teaches using our SmartMusic software allows students to continually develop necessary rhythmic figures," said G-P High School Head Band Director Chris Morrow. "At G-P, we've seen firsthand how it has helped our band become stronger, and we look forward to Mr. Sanders sharing his knowledge and effort with other music educators in the great state of Texas."

G-PISD Superintendent Dr. Paul Clore said the district's band program remains successful thanks to the efforts of its leadership, and those who support them. "It isn't surprising to me that a teaching method used in our band program is one others would like to replicate," Clore said. "We have exceptional educators and students, as well as parents, who have built the program to be what it is today. This advancement is one of many, and we commend Mr. Sanders, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Morrow and Mr. (Sammy) Posada (who are all G-PISD band directors), as well as all who support the program and work to provide the very best opportunities for students."

Sanders admits it is humbling to have these methods chosen by TMEA. "It's great to find something that works, and you know can help others too. Since we began using our custom charts we've noticed students sight-reading and playing more complex music much faster than before. We know we can help them achieve more through music by setting a strong foundation in rhythm, so things can only improve from here."

[Click here](#) to view photo(s) of Sanders, Anderson teaching G-PMS band students.

[Click here](#) to read the article titled "*Rhythm that Teaches Itself*," by Sanders, published in a SmartMusic blog.

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