



Wando High School
Chas Coker, Principal
 1000 Warrior Way
 Mount Pleasant, SC 29466
 (843) 881-8200

Media Release

Wando Marching Band Completes Historic Season with Finalist Award at Grand Nationals Competition

Warriors won state and regional titles earlier in the year

Mount Pleasant, SC (November 20, 2025) - Since July, the students, directors, staff, and volunteers of the Wando Marching Band have been working towards what has become a historic marching season for the program. Earlier this month, they capped off their checklist of goals after competing with the top marching bands from across the country.

Close to 110 bands, over 20,000 students, convened at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, IN, from November 13-16, 2025, for the 50th anniversary year of the Bands of America Grand National Championship. Giants of the high school marching band world, with years of competition dominance, and small newcomer bands displayed their talents to the judges. Energetic audiences reacted with standing ovations for every band. The band community sees this annual event as a showcase and celebration, in addition to being the highest level of competition. One of the smallest bands traveled 4000 miles from Kenai, Alaska. They stole hearts and were awarded the annual *Espirit de Corps* Award.

Considered a mid-sized band, yet still competing with the largest in the country, Wando Marching Band includes 182 student musicians and Color Guard. One thing that makes Wando unique is the inclusion of middle school students. Wando Band welcomes musicians and Color Guard candidates from feeder middle schools: Cario, Laing, and Moultrie. This year, the Band is comprised heavily of middle schoolers and freshmen, totaling 43 percent of the total Band membership. Wando's model differs from that of the largest nationally competitive bands, some of which have more than 400 members, which typically only allow students in grades 10 through 12 to participate in their competitive programs.

With fewer students, younger students, and a smaller budget, Wando still managed to achieve what seemed like a dream during scorching rehearsals in July. Before traveling to Bands of America Grand Nationals, the Wando Band had already experienced two major successes. In October, they earned the Bands of America Carolina Regional Championship. Earlier in November, they also earned the program's 16th South Carolina Band Directors Association State Marching Band Championship. Local and regional success often does not translate into national success. Unlike Texas and Indiana, South Carolina isn't known as a hotbed of nationally competitive band programs. Two other South Carolina bands were part of the 108 attending the Grand National: Dorman High School Marching Band and Nation Ford High School Marching Band. Both had impressive performances, and Nation Ford earned a spot in the semifinals as well (top 36)

After Wando's strong first-round preliminary performance on Thursday night, they earned a second performance by being selected as a semifinalist. Along with 35 other bands, the field of competitors had been narrowed, and they would all compete their shows again.

To prepare for the Semi-finals Performance, students, staff, and volunteers hit the ground running at 2:00 a.m., Saturday. Warm-ups and rehearsals helped them refine details of the show and calm their nerves. Directors Bobby Lambert, Lanie Radecke, and Matthew Kilby reminded students to focus, apply the corrections, and trust their training, all of which had brought them to this unique opportunity. Their last encouragement was, "Enjoy the run!".

Wando's semifinal performance concluded with a brief, joy-filled celebration. Students congratulated one another in the field for about 10 seconds. It was then time to focus on what could become another chance to perform, if their performance would stand up and be judged in the top 12.

Thirty-six bands would be narrowed down to the top 12, in no particular order, to compete in the Finals Competition on Saturday afternoon. The crowd in Lucas Oil Stadium sat quietly but ready to cheer, in anticipation of the results. One perennial favorite after another was called and would compete again in the finals. Most finalist bands' names were associated with long histories as national title holders; 11 of the 12 finalists had been called, and finally, the name that all of Charleston County and South Carolina had awaited, "WANDO!". Wando Marching Band, called last, was set to compete first in Bands of America Grand Nationals Finals, just a few hours after the announcement.

Wando is a small, confident, prepared group of students and student leadership, with encouraging staff, and die-hard volunteers. They never assumed being called last meant that would ultimately be their placement after the final 12 bands competed.

Wando went through their pre-performance routine for the last time. Students were focused and ready to let the show flow. They took the field, first of the 12 bands competing in the finals.

This would be the very last performance of this show, ever. From 7th graders to seniors, this was it. They were in it together. Every hot day, every blister, every sunburn, every rainy day, every uniform fitting, every sunburn, every meal on the run, every lost hour of sleep, every travel change, every lost earbud, every broken or malfunctioning prop, every volunteer hour, every ride to rehearsal, it all came down to this. This band performed its best run ever in the final round of competition. They knew they had done all they could. It was in the judges' hands.

After all 12 schools performed, Lucas Oil Stadium field was filled with every student who competed in the finals. From end zone to end zone, in every imaginable uniform color, there were smiles on every face. Every spectator reflected those smiles, blended with a healthy dose of happy tears. Each student, each band, had already achieved something very few have. It's an elite group, and Wando Marching Band, rightfully, stands among them.

The lights dimmed, the spotlights circled, and the announcer began. Wando's show, entitled "We Are Such Stuff" moved the audience and the judges during their three Grand Nationals performances and was ultimately awarded 11th Place. It was a victory! It's the determination, grit, and talent of 182 Charleston County School District students, guided by imaginative,

thoughtful, experienced, and encouraging staff who have built this program into one that is always a threat to compete at the highest levels in the state, region, and the nation.

The celebration was uncontainable! Students and fans were overwhelmed by what the band had accomplished and the journey that had brought them to historic greatness, standing side by side with other long-successful programs.

Charleston County School District Superintendent Anita Huggins has enjoyed following and encouraging the students during this historic season.

"The Wando Band has, once again, shown what passion, hard work, and unity can accomplish," said Superintendent Huggins. "To finish 11th in the nation at Grand Nationals is an incredible achievement, and I am immensely proud of our students, Mr. Lambert, and the entire Wando team. Their commitment to excellence inspires our entire community."

This is the first time in Wando Marching Band's long history that they have earned these three tremendous honors in the same season: Bands of America Regional Championship, South Carolina Band Directors Association Class 6A Marching Band Championship, and Bands of America Grand National Championship Finalist.

For more information about the award-winning Wando Marching Band, please contact Paula O'Reilly of the Wando Band Boosters Association at secretary@wandobands.org.

In addition, please credit Ms. O'Reilly as the author of the press release.

###

About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 51,000 students in 90 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.