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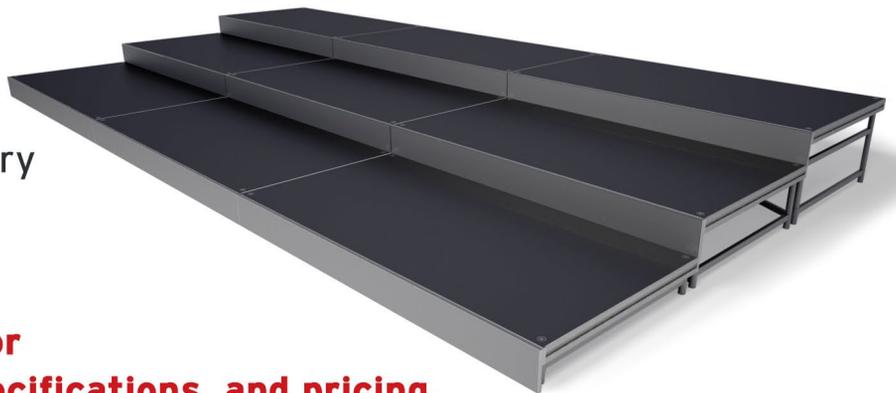


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### SHOWCHOIR CAMPS OF AMERICA Unique, Enriching, and Demanding

by Cassidy Clevenger

In having the privilege to discuss Showchoir Camps of America experiences with numerous counselors and students at SCA, I discovered that the overwhelming consensus is that SCA is unique, enriching, and demanding (in all the right ways). These are experiences that teachers, counselors, and students genuinely cherish.

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### WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN UPGRADING YOUR PERFORMANCE SPACE

#### Don't Leave Your Lighting in the Dark

by Robert Mentele

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# EDITOR'S LETTER

I have little doubt that those of you in the classroom are hearing a lot of talk recently about the Netflix series, adapted from a young adult novel, called "13 Reasons Why." I wish we lived in a world where there would be no need for you to be monitoring your students for warning signs of suicide, but the statistics show there is good reason to be cautious and alert—ready to help your students if you sense they need it. Show choir directors don't just see their students for an hour a day, like many other teacher/student relationships. Because of the nature of your jobs, you know your kids well, and your kids probably trust you more than any other adult in your school. While that's a wonderful thing, there's a responsibility there too that can't be ignored.

Though most of you are surely familiar with the story, even if you haven't watched the series or read the book, the event takes place after a young woman, Hannah Baker, has killed herself, and she has left behind thirteen cassette tapes—each one dedicated to a person in her life that played a part in her decision: whether it was a person who harmed her directly in some way, or a person who harmed her through inaction, or even a person who loved her but didn't make the "right" choice in a crucial moment. The last tape is dedicated to the only adult represented on the thirteen tapes: a distracted school counselor who presumably could have saved her if only he had said the right thing or at least read between the lines to see how much she was suffering.

Kalhan Rosenblatt of NBC News addresses some of the concerns being shared on various platforms about the potential dangers of the series. He cites mental health experts who fear the show glorifies teen suicide, among other problems, and could ultimately be "more harmful than helpful" when it comes to opening a dialogue with teens most at risk. Dr. Victor Schwartz, the medical director of the JED Foundation, explains that the show is filled with imagery that could be harmful to the children or young adults already dealing with thoughts of suicide.

Schwartz adds, "The whole thing is an extended revenge fantasy" with an erroneous premise: that others are directly to blame for her decision. He even suggests the scene with the counselor could prevent other students who are suffering from seeking out their school counselor, for fear the interaction would be just as pointless and painful. The show was so disconcerting to many mental health workers and workers in suicide prevention centers that they worked with JED and Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) to publish talking points for young adults and their parents, guardians, counselors, or teachers.

The National Association of School Psychologists notes that suicide is the second leading cause of death among school-aged youth, even though suicide is ultimately preventable. They explain that young people who are considering suicide are likely to offer warning signs that friends, parents, and teachers could recognize—if they are paying attention. They add how important it is to not brush off the importance of these warning signs and that students and adults acting together within the school community are empowered to take actions that can save lives.

They name several predictors that could be associated with an increased risk of suicidal thoughts, such as mental illness (including depression, conduct disorders, and substance abuse), family stress or dysfunction, environmental risks—such as a firearm in the home—or a situational crisis like the death of a loved one, family violence, or sexual abuse. The warning signs include direct threats of suicide or indirect threats, such as, "I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up again," suicidal notes or plans, giving away prized possessions, making a will, changes in behavior or appearance, or a preoccupation with death.

If you believe one of your students is at risk, The National Association of School Psychologists advises to first remain calm. They suggest that you focus on concern for the student's well-being and avoid accusatory language. Be certain you are listening closely and reassuring the student that there is help for them, and remind them that they will not feel this way forever. Be careful there's no judgment in your statements or your tone. Then, of course, stay with them until someone else becomes involved in helping them—whether that's a parent or a school psychologist. They note that the entire school staff must work to create an environment where students feel they can share information. That way, school psychologists and crisis-response personnel, who are trained to intervene when a student is identified as at-risk, can take over, but it may very well fall to you to get the student to those places.

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# SHOWCHOIR CAMPS OF AMERICA

*Unique, Enriching,  
and Demanding*

by Cassidy Clevenger

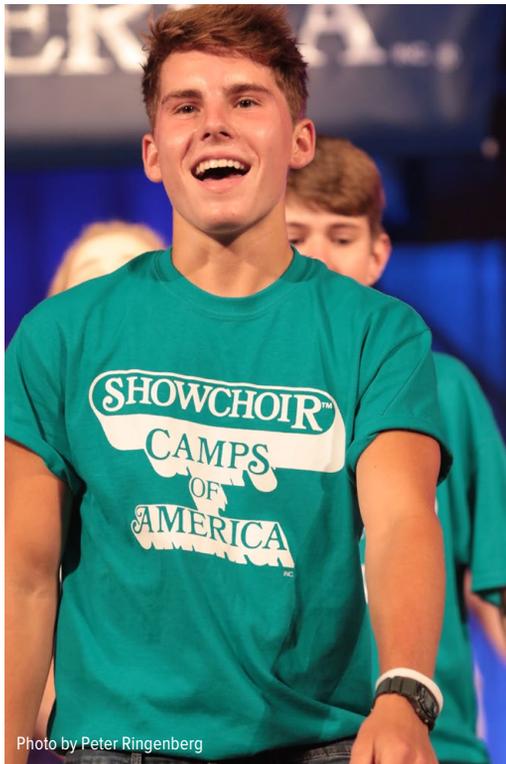
In having the privilege to discuss Showchoir Camps of America experiences with numerous counselors and students at SCA, I discovered that the overwhelming consensus is that SCA is unique, enriching, and demanding (in all the right ways). These are times that teachers, counselors, and students genuinely cherish.

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## A Supportive, Challenging, and Creative Environment

Based upon what I learned from my interviews conducted with both professionals and students at SCA, they make SCA sound like the most positive experience any performer could hope to have, while also consequentially sweating their perm out!

Camp counselor Paige Balbilla described SCA as being packed to the brim with good vibes and dedication. Staff and students alike encourage one another to push their potential and become stronger singers, dancers, and generally strive to put on the best show possible. Student Paige Miller had a similar experience; she shared, "The atmosphere is full of love and support from everyone in attendance. The counselors are always so helpful and talented, and the teachers are so kind."



In addition to dedication and hard work, support is a consistent theme mentioned by both students and counselors alike. Students like Miller elaborate on how palpable the support is, and how she felt equally comfortable among both her peers and instructors. Cameron Weiler, a teacher at the camp, really emphasized how organized and friendly every aspect of SCA is for the camp-goers. In fact, I have never spoken to so many people who all reported such an overwhelming amount of positivity from a summer camp experience.

Weiler shared that the counselors at SCA receive incredible access to workshops and resources designed for performing art professionals. Many of the people I spoke with praised the camp for their common practice of bringing in top-notch, well-respected professionals—some even of celebrity status—from across the country to lead workshops for teachers and students.

### The Benefit of Challenging Rehearsals

To say these camp-goers work hard would be an egregious understatement. Dan McKee, SCA counselor, explained that those involved will practice for eight hours a day, and prepare—from scratch—to perform a twenty-minute showchoir set at the end of the week.

Weiler further explained that the teachers also participate in their own showcase to perform for the students, saying, “This is an awesome reminder of what we are asking from our students in rehearsal.” It sounded as though everyone would be leaving practice with sore legs but wide smiles.

### Shared Passions and Making Time for Fun

All that said, all work and no play makes Jack a dull dancer, so SCA also promotes the fact that everyone is surrounded by

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immensely talented, kind, creative, like-minded people. This environment is designed to both challenge and inspire all camp participants. As Danny McKee, SCA camp counselor, said, "Being surrounded by nearly 700 peers from all over the country puts each student in a position to learn from others and make new, potentially lifelong friends." Mark Myers, a current doctoral student in music education who has done everything from be a camper, to counselor, to pianist, to teacher, mirrored this sentiment, and explained he is forever grateful for the colleagues, mentors, and friends he gained; these bonds are truly more familial than professional.

Jennifer Gulsvig, both a former camper and current staff at SCA, explained how critical her experiences with SCA were to her life, largely through the relationships—especially friendships—she developed over the



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years at camp. Professionally speaking, Gulsvig states, "The teachers and clinicians who are at this camp are some of the most influential teachers, and give everything they have into their programs," and she concluded her thoughts by saying she is infinitely grateful for the colleagues and mentors she gained because of SCA.

Gulsvig believes that her involvement has ultimately turned her into a better educator. Weiler shared a similar sentiment, stating that he has learned new tools and techniques for how to shape his students into better musicians. Additionally, throughout this experience, he can bring them together as a more cohesive group.

## Personal Growth Through Support

It was mentioned by multiple people, including counselors McKee and Balbilla, that time management was critical during camp; after camp was over, this skill has extended into many other aspects of their life. Additionally, other traits like responsibility, accountability, compassion, dedication, and leadership are all valued and promoted at camp.

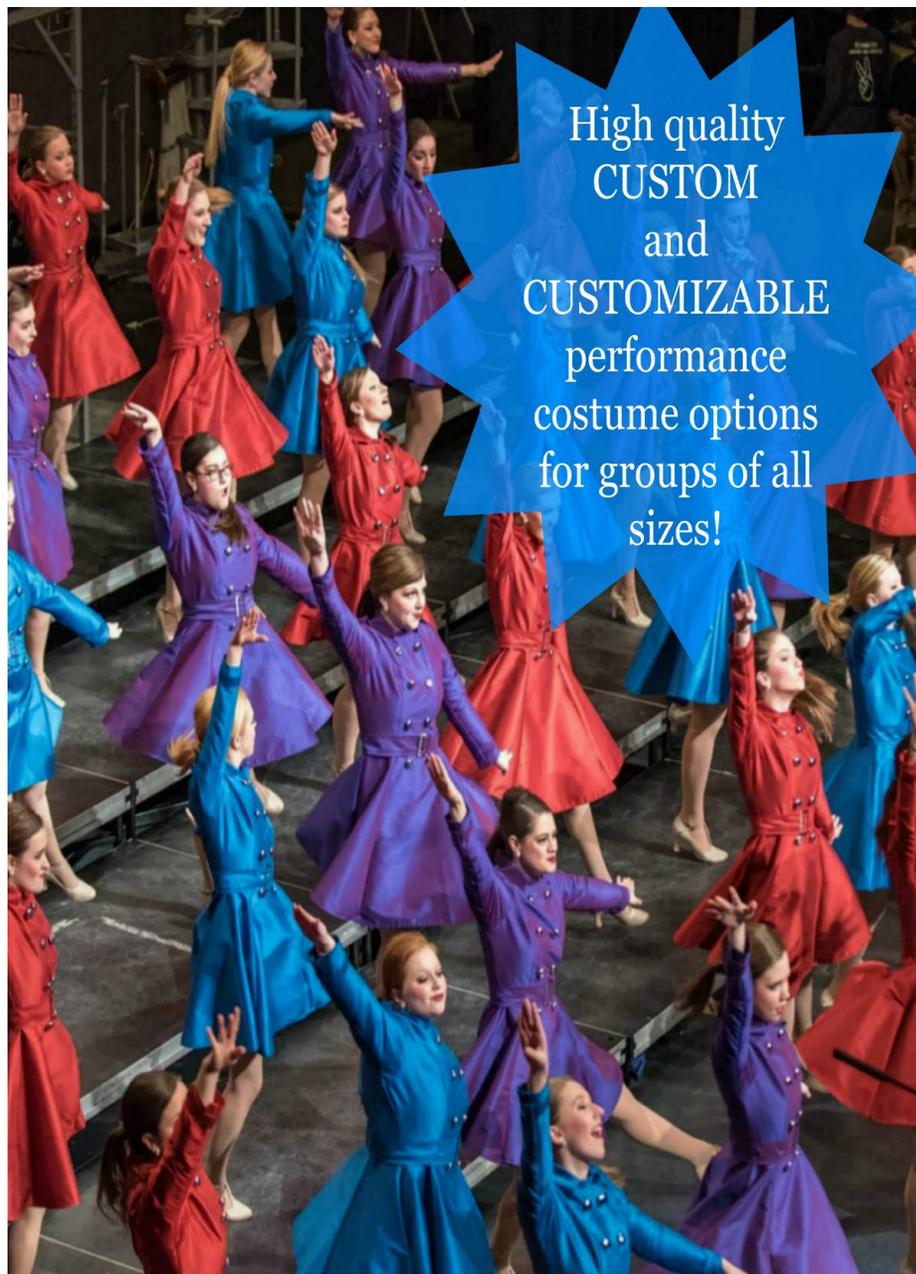
Similarly, Gulsvig stated she learned to never stop growing and learning, and this is largely due to her experiences with SCA. Weiler, another educator, also notes incredible improvements, both in himself and his students. In describing his students after their experiences at SCA, he adds that they are not just more skilled in their singing and dancing, "but also in their attitude toward rehearsal and performance." Weiler explains, "I am lucky to send students to this camp each summer, because I see endless payback in the school year."

That said, this is not an experience that is exclusive to the staff at SCA. High school student Miller explained that by attending the camp, she learned to reach out to others, and she is no longer "afraid to put myself out there." Current counselors, like Gulsvig and Myers—for instance—were both campers before they became staff, and it was clear that the positive payback from SCA started early in their camp-going experiences.

## Networking, Insight, Experience, and Relationships

While interviewing students and teachers associated with Showchoir Camps of America, I quickly realized that this two-week camp is far more than just something young performers can slap on their résumé.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Cassidy Clevenger is a Samford University alum. After earning her BA in Psychology, she studied Gerontology at Georgia State. She now works for the University of Alabama at Birmingham as a Research Specialist in Nephrology and is pursuing freelance writing. She can be reached at [cclevenger@uabmc.edu](mailto:cclevenger@uabmc.edu).

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A large performance space, likely a school auditorium, is shown from a perspective behind the stage. In the foreground, several people are seated at a control desk, operating a complex lighting console with numerous buttons and sliders. The console is illuminated with various colors. In the background, a stage is lit with bright blue and white spotlights. A large audience of students is visible in the bleachers, many wearing red and white. The ceiling is high, and a large lighting rig with many spotlights is suspended from it. The overall atmosphere is professional and focused on the technical aspects of a performance.

# WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN UPGRADING YOUR PERFORMANCE SPACE

**DON'T LEAVE YOUR LIGHTING IN THE DARK**

by Robert Mentele

When it comes to upgrading your school's performance space, there is typically a delicate balance between cost and integrating the latest technology. Usually a lot of thought is given to the visible aspects of the space, and not much consideration is taken for the gear that makes it all work. However, those systems have a direct impact on the quality of the presentation on the stage.

Sometimes the task seems overwhelming and complicated. Yet, providing the best auditorium for your students and classes, and staying on top of the return on your investments, is not that difficult, as long as your system is designed properly.

If a system is designed well, you should be able to integrate new technology easily and without any drastic changes. Ultimately, if your system works, and you're not having reliability issues, it can last for 10 to 20 years.

No matter what your system is like now, it's always smart to think about what you'll need in the future, and what technology it may be able to handle in upcoming years, and even decades. In order to make sure your upgrades last as long as possible, always purchase quality gear and "future proof" your space as much as possible.

With any upgrade that involves anything as large and as complicated as a performance space, the biggest concern is safety. Be sure to always have your system inspected by a licensed professional. This doesn't just include your lighting, but rigging, audio and any installed systems should be inspected before making any changes. If everything in

your system is safe to use, up to code and in full working order, you can make your first big decisions.

The first question you should ask is, "What can we afford?" Once you have an idea of your working budget, you can begin to parse out upgrading opportunities. Figure out what you can tackle right away, and what steps you'll have to take to get there.

### Small budget (Up to \$25,000)

If you don't have a budget for upgrading your school's performance space(s), be sure to add saving to the top of your goals list. That way, when you have enough, you'll be able to spend it wisely. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is moving forward with an upgrade to your lighting system without having a sufficient budget to do it properly. If your space is under-designed, it won't last very long, and will likely have to be fixed shortly after installation. This not only deprives your students and staff of the proper tools to learn, but it can also be waste of the funds you have available.

Think about your neighbors—are any spaces around you upgrading their own

systems? You may be able to purchase their second-hand equipment, and give it more life in your auditorium. This is easiest with smaller items, such as lighting fixtures and soft goods, but you can repurpose almost anything. Purchasing used gear from reputable resellers can also be a great option while you save up for a bigger overhaul.

### Medium budget (\$25,000-100,000)

If you have a failing infrastructure—or antiquated gear you can't get parts for—your money would be best spent upgrading those pieces. The first major option is to simply upgrade your power control system to something functional. It's not the cheapest, but can last for many years.

Many spaces look into converting to LED when changes need to be made. Upgrading your entire system to handle this newer technology can often save you more money in the long run, versus only partially upgrading the system. Installing a "hybrid" system, one that can handle LED and incandescent fixtures, is typically more expensive than changing the entire system to LED. So, if it's a matter of waiting a few years to do a proper overhaul, it's probably worth doing so.

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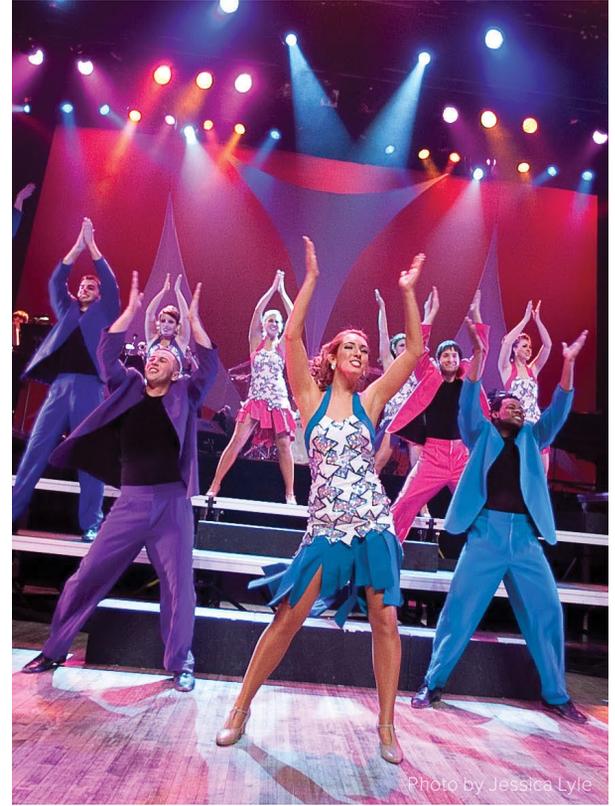
If your infrastructure is decent, but aging, you can usually integrate new technology. That may include upgrading your incandescent lighting fixtures to a more current and efficient model. Getting rid of 6x9s and 360Qs, and going with a more modern leko, can have a dramatic effect on the product you're able to provide on stage.

If your power infrastructure is fine, was updated within last 10 years or so, and you have a lot of new gear, think about offering your students the opportunity to use the newest types of equipment. LEDs can be integrated easily if you have a dimming system can provide undimmed powered through relay or constant current modules. LED fixtures offer more flexibility in designs, and the opportunity for students to use the newest gear they'll be seeing out in the field. Smaller school districts or smaller colleges often aren't able to provide the newest devices, so upgrading to include them is always beneficial for your students' future job prospects.

When thinking about switching to LEDs, part of the cost difference is the energy savings. It's well known that LEDs consume less power, but they also don't release as much heat as incandescent, so they save money on your cooling bills. This is often harder to quantify in actual savings, but it should be taken into account.

If you don't have a system that can provide proper power for LEDs, you can always run dedicated circuits from power outlets to those devices. Starting with a handful of LED par fixtures is generally an affordable way to start to integrate new items into your system, without too much investment. You can get a good number of LED par fixtures for the cost of one decent moving light.

If you already have LED fixtures, the next step would be to look into moving lights. These have seen a lot of advances recently, and have even started to include LED engines. If you can afford to, this is a great place to spend extra money.



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An important thing to remember is that moving lights take a lot more maintenance time than any other fixture types, including LEDs. They will add substantially to any programming time, because someone will have to program every parameter of every light. While they are more time consuming to integrate into your space, the effect can also be pretty impressive.

Any time you're looking into upgrading a system to begin using multi-parameter devices, like LEDs and moving lights, you need to make sure your control system will be able to handle it. Make sure you have data distribution, CAT 5 or DMX from your lighting console to the fixtures' locations. If it's an existing system, and you don't have the money to install wires, there are wireless DMX transmission tools available that have become very reliable, and can create a large system with multiple universes of output. When thinking about upgrading, making sure your console can handle multi-parameter devices may have to be on the list before deciding on actual fixtures, as they will be unusable without it.

### Large budget (\$100,000+)

If now is the time to upgrade multiple parts of your performance space, and you have an appropriate amount of funding to allocate to the lighting system, you now have more foundational and overarching options.

Take into account the feedback of the space's staff and major users, desired technological integration and budget. Do you want to go all LED, or do you want to look into a Hybrid system? Do you need to make any other major foundational upgrades to the system, or do you just need to fix the power control devices and upgrade the lighting fixtures?

No matter how much you have to spend on upgrades, it is extremely important to bring in an outside consultant or advisor to help you through the entire process. Sometimes internal employees don't (and can't) know the best technology available at the time—simply because they don't see it every day. Some retailers will offer this service for free, and there are also dedicated consultants that charge a fee. This cost is generally

worth it because you're going to be sure to have a better working and cohesive system in the end. Just don't try to do it alone.

Whether your auditoriums primarily house show choir or theater productions, concerts or a little bit of everything, you always want to make sure to present the best product possible. Often, that starts with a good foundation and power system, and extends all the way to individual stage and house lights.

Upgrading your space is an important part of making sure you stay up-to-date with the latest technology, and by taking these considerations into account, you'll set yourself up to have successful performance seasons for years to come.

---

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Robert Mentele is a professional technical director and designer, and has designed lighting for Theatre, Dance, Corporate Events and Concerts. As Lighting Product Specialist for Full Compass, he helps to bring the newest and most innovative products to fellow lighting designers.



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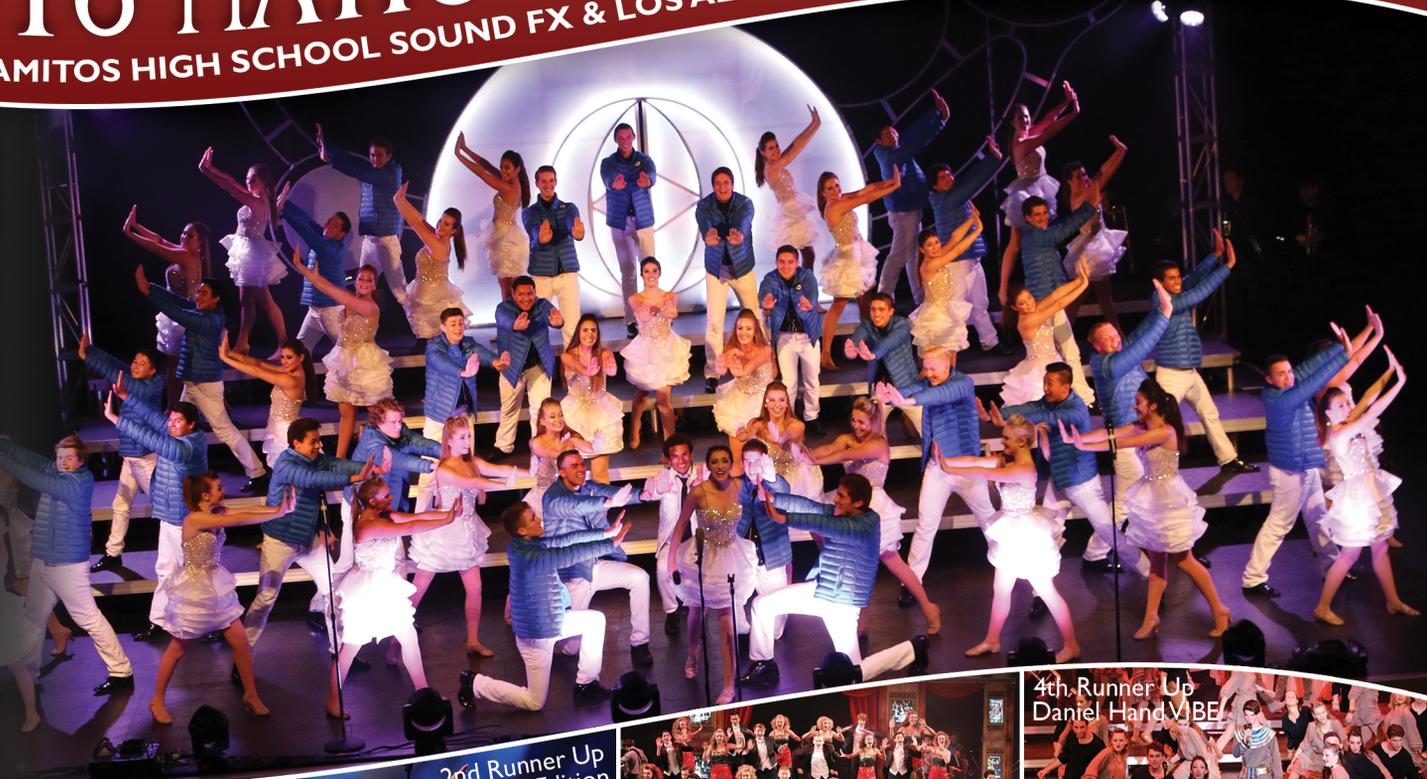


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Vocal Vanguard	Lester Miller, III
Visual Vanguard	Kevin Chase
Best New Director	Hannah Ryan (Johnston HS, IA)
Best New Choreographer	Stephani Hyatt
Best Arranger	Brock Keiper
Best Costumer	Gail McInnis Productions
Spirit of Service	Onalaska High School
Student Spirit of Service	Alex Wampler (Marysvill HS, OH)
Most Promising New Program	Wichita "Flight" (Kristina Sims, Director)
Best Regional Competition	Great River (Central & West HS, IA)



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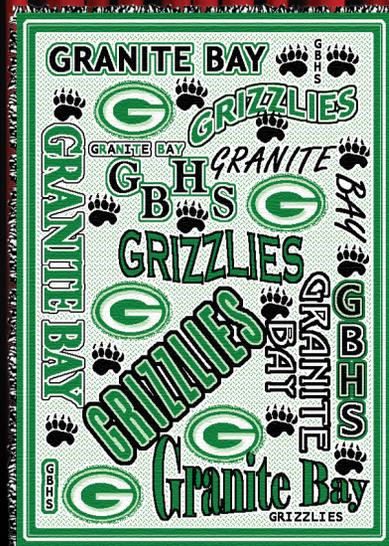
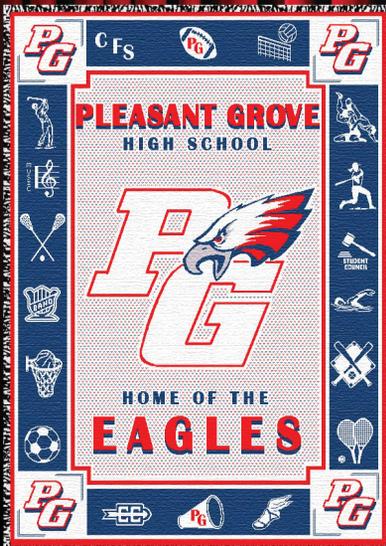
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