CMEA Bay Section 2026 Fall Conference | San José State University

# Programing with Purpose, Master Educators Share their Approach

Saturday, October 31, 2026 | 11:00-11:50 AM | Student Union Room 4

**Presenters: Michael Boitz, Michael Pakaluk, Joni Swensen**

## OVERVIEW

In this session, three distinguished music educators share the philosophies, practices, and programming decisions that have shaped successful instrumental music programs across a range of school communities. Drawing on decades of collective experience, Michael Boitz, Michael Pakaluk, and Joni Swensen will explore how intentional program design, thoughtful sequencing of instruction, and a commitment to student growth can build thriving music programs and sustain high levels of artistic achievement. Attendees will gain insight into the approaches, priorities, and long-term perspectives that inform the work of master educators, with ideas to reflect upon and apply within their own teaching contexts.

## MASTER EDUCATORS

### *Michael Boitz*

Michael Boitz is in his 29th year leading the Instrumental Music Program at Saratoga High School, where he served as Department Chair for 22 years. Under his leadership, the program has grown to serve approximately 40% of the school's 1,100 students, including an orchestra program that expanded from 11 students to 160–190 annually. His advanced orchestra, *Saratoga Strings*, has been selected to perform at the prestigious Midwest Clinic three times and at the American String Teachers Association National Orchestra Festival, in addition to performing at regional and international conferences. Boitz has led international tours across Europe, Asia, and Australia, with performances at renowned venues including Carnegie Hall, the Sydney Opera House, Vienna's Musikverein, and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw. A recipient of numerous state and regional honors, including the California Music Educators Association's Orchestra Educator of the Year, Band Educator of the Year, and Bay Section Educator of the Year awards, he has also been inducted into the John Philip Sousa Legion of Honor. A respected leader in music education, Boitz regularly serves as a guest conductor, clinician, and adjudicator throughout the United States and internationally, including presenting clinics for the World Association of Symphonic Bands and Ensembles and the Midwest Clinic. He holds a Bachelor of Music from Concordia College and a master's degree from Northwestern University.

### *Michael Pakaluk*

Mike Pakaluk is a recovering Marching Band director and teaches at Lynbrook High School, where he directs three concert bands, two string orchestras, and a Symphony Orchestra. Under his direction, Lynbrook's orchestras have been invited to perform at CASMEC twice, at the Midwest Clinic, The National Orchestra Festival, the CMEA State Festival, and at our own Bay Section Conferences. Mike has received the CMEA Bay Section Outstanding Orchestra Educator award, the CMEA Richard L. Levin Orchestra Award, and is active as a clinician and adjudicator for CMEA and Music in the Parks. He has served on the boards of CBDA, CODA and SCCBDA.

### *Joni Swensen*

Joni Swenson retired in 2020 after 18 years as Director of Orchestras at Santa Monica High School (Samohi) in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, a district with a longstanding commitment to arts education where all students choose between band, choir, or orchestra beginning in third grade. During her tenure, Joni team-taught seven levels of orchestra, serving students from beginning through advanced levels and helping foster a comprehensive orchestral program. Before joining Samohi, she taught orchestra in the Sacramento City Unified School District as an itinerant teacher serving elementary and middle schools. She later moved to San Jose, where she taught at Lincoln High School, Castillero and Hoover Middle Schools, and Trace and Simonds Elementary Schools. Throughout her career, Joni has been dedicated to developing young musicians and supporting music education across grade levels. In retirement, she continues to share her expertise and passion for music by coaching orchestra sectionals and providing private violin lessons.