

Gearing Down: The Last Days of School 20 Years Ago in Bandworld

by Max F. Dalby

The organization of rehearsal procedures for the last week or so of any school schedule presents many unusual problems. In almost every high school in the country, the senior class begins to disappear from the academic scene two to three weeks before the actual end of the school year.

Senior Day, graduation rehearsals, the actual ceremonies themselves, plus the eroding of motivational influences which have interested them in the past create many discipline and scheduling problems for the school teacher and particularly for the band director, who sees his carefully constructed organization falling in ruin at the year's end. (This happens also in the junior high school, although not so dramatically.) Many teachers throw up their metamorphic hands in despair and go along with all of the confusion and lack of direction which seem typical of most other classes at this time of year.

It has always seemed to me, however, that the canny band director should view these last few days as a time to cover many topics and conduct many activities there was little time for during the pressure of the regular schedule. Since at this time the seniors, the band's most experienced, though not always capable, players, attend class irregularly and are concerned with their own future rather than that of the band, we must learn to do with the students who are left. Obviously, there is no point in trying to motivate the departing senior to further high-level performance at this particular time.

Following is a list of activities which will build for the next year and will give the younger players knowledge and experience which may be very valuable in the development of next year's band:

1. What better time to give younger players added confidence and experience in sight-reading? You will have to use easier music, but this is an ideal time to build playing confidence.
2. Make preparations to improve instrumentation. This is a good time to talk about changing cornet players to baritone, horn or tuba; trombone players to baritone; clarinet players to bass clarinet; saxophone players to bassoon or oboe--and to actually begin the process.
3. Let student conductors function, with adequate time to help them improve their techniques. Perhaps this is a good time also to discover your student assistant for next year, or the pep band leader, or the jazz band director who will assist you.
4. Now there is time for auditions, to catch up on hearing those young players there was not time for last month.
5. How about electing officers for next year and letting each candidate have time to explain his particular qualifications?

6. There is now time to hear those recordings which were neglected during the heavy press of obligations and to give that lecture on music history of theory which you alluded to last December. In short, one has a few hours to do many of the "talk" type things which are important in motivating young players to keep up their skills during the vacation months.
7. Get the marching band organized and under way for next year with attention to fundamentals and actual street and stadium marching. The weather will never be better!
8. Take time to inventory uniforms, instruments, equipment.
9. Get the library work done, the filing caught up, the music repaired.
10. Arrange the summer schedule of sectionals, rehearsals, or private lessons.

There is no end to the kinds of things an ingenious band director can put together to keep his program operational and forward-looking. If he is at his wit's end, he might ask the students. They will usually generate dozens of worth-while ideas.