

Teachers On TikTok. Where To Next?

By Susan Aramony

NEWARK, Del. — Fans of the popular video app TikTok sounded the alarm recently when the United States Congress passed a bill that could lead to a nationwide ban on the service – if its Chinese-based owner, ByteDance, refuses to sell its stake in the company.

Some of the loudest voices making their objections known came from an unlikely group: teachers.

TikTok has become a surprising avenue for an ever-growing community of educators. Veteran and new teachers alike are using the platform both in and out of the classroom for everything from sharing videos showcasing a “day in the life,” to fun dances with students and “teacher tips and tricks.”

Should the ban take effect, these educators will have to find new avenues for connecting with their students.

The Benefits of Social Media in the Classroom

Many educators are adamant on the benefits of TikTok and other forms of social media for both students and teachers.

Ashleigh Brant, a third grade public school teacher, says bringing social media into her classroom has been widely accepted by students and faculty alike. She says it helps her students use and develop their personal talents.

“All kids aren’t good writers, all kids aren’t good readers, but all kids have something that they excel at; whether it is drawing or making videos on TikTok,” she says. “Having them show their different talents is something that I feel like they would appreciate.

By integrating social media into her teaching, Brant says, she’s not only making learning more relatable, she is also helping students develop digital literacy skills, which are increasingly important in today’s world. Brant’s approach also highlights a current broader trend in education: recognizing and valuing diverse talents and skills among students.

Plus, TikTok’s format of short, engaging videos resonates well with the digital-native generation, making it easier for students to absorb lessons and connect with their teachers.

Many teachers have found TikTok to be a powerful tool in building rapport and engagement with students. Adam Yasenosky, a middle school digital media teacher, says TikTok helps him to connect with his students, a group that can be notoriously difficult to reach.

“They’re awkward, growing, and their bodies are changing,” says Yasenosky. “When you take the weirdness out of it, and you empower the kids to just be weird and be okay with it...this is the time to figure out who you are, and I think TikTok is helping us do that.”

The Risks of Social Media

Some teachers, however, have experienced issues with using social media publicly, raising their concerns about it as an avenue for teaching.

Rachel Collison, a University of Delaware alum and special education teacher, shared one of the issues she has faced as an educator on the platform.

“Somebody contacted me asking for sexual content, saying, ‘If you don’t, I’m going to tell your school that you’re a porn star,’” says Collison. “Then he sent me the address of my school, and my heart dropped.” Collison worked with her school to handle the situation. She continued her use of the platform after receiving over \$1,000 in donations for her classroom, feeling that the positives well outweigh the negatives.

Critics argue that social media platforms may expose students to inappropriate content and worry that it can be distracting to students. However, proponents like Brant believe that with proper guidance and oversight, these platforms can be powerful tools for education.

Where to Next?

The TikTok bill was signed into law by President Biden in April. The law gives ByteDance nine months to sell the platform, plus an additional three months if a sale is in progress. If those terms are not met, TikTok will be banned in the U.S.

With the potential ban hanging over the platform, educators and other users on the app may now be wondering what their next avenue for connecting with students may be. Many teachers are already using other platforms to connect with students and each other, including Instagram and YouTube.

As the debate over potential social media bans continues, one thing is clear: the intersection of education and social media is here to stay. Whether through TikTok, Instagram, or the next big platform, dedicated teachers will continue to find innovative ways to connect with their students and enhance their learning experiences. The future of education in the digital age will undoubtedly be shaped by these ongoing conversations and the creative solutions that emerge from them.

In the meantime, educators like Brant, Yasenosky, and Collison remain committed to their mission, embracing the opportunities and challenges that come with teaching in a digital world. The question of “where to next?” may still be up in the air, but the determination to make a positive impact on their students’ lives remains unwavering.