**High Schools to TikTok: We’re Catching Feelings**

Source: Taylor Lorenz, NewYorkTimes.com, October 19, 2019

On the wall of a classroom that is home to the West Orange High School TikTok club, large words are scrawled across a whiteboard: “Wanna be TikTok famous? Join TikTok club.”

It’s working. “There’s a lot of TikTok-famous kids at our school,” said Amanda DiCastro, who is 14 and a freshman. “Probably 20 people have gotten famous off random things.”

The embrace of the app at this school is similar to other schools across the United States, where students are forming TikTok clubs to dance, sing and perform skits for the app. Unlike other social media networks, TikTok is winning over some teachers, like Michael Callahan, a teacher at West Orange, who had never heard of TikTok before the students told him about it.

He is an adviser to the school’s club and said he loves how the app brings students from different friend groups together. “You see a lot more teamwork and collaboration,” he said, “and less focus on individuals.”

In many of the videos on the app, which are 15 seconds to a minute long, school hallways, classrooms and courtyards serve as a backdrop. Unfortunately, if kids aren’t filming themselves at school, they’re making jokes about school. One popular meme on the app mocks one grade for being "cringy" and trying too hard.

Several students at West Orange have seen their videos shoot to the top of the popular “For You” page of the app. In the spring, the school’s valedictorian went viral for a Minecraft video; another student got more than three million views for a parody of the film “Mean Girls.” Ireland McTague, a 15-year-old sophomore at St. Agnes Academy in Texas, said she spends about 16 hours a week on the app, creating or consuming videos. Many people are worried about how addicting TikTok is.

TikTok’s uses artificial intelligence to learn what users want and fill their feeds with it. That technology works so well that the app’s owner, Bytedance (a Chinese company) last year introduced anti-addiction measures in Douyin, the Chinese version, to help both users and the parents who may be worried about them.

# ‘If It’s on the Internet, It’s Not Private’

While some teachers enjoy TikTok, others like Emma Peden, a Spanish teacher in South Carolina, don't agree with it. “Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat — all those interfaces — can feed bullying,” she said. “I think kids can be recording things that they shouldn’t.”

One encouraging sign is that videos about topics that high schoolers are all studying sometimes generate thousands of views and become memes in themselves. Kate Sandoval said she has made TikToks for her role in student government, and Mr. Callahan, the adviser, is thinking how he can use the app to teach students about government and social studies. "There’s a lot more than just funny videos,” Kaylani Heisler said. “I see countless ways to take notes, get organized. I see chemistry study aids.”

Students occasionally involve their teachers in TikTok stunts, and many educators have set up their own accounts. Sarah Jacobs, a physics teacher at San Jose High School in California, said some of her students made TikToks explaining Newton’s Laws for extra credit last year.

Whitesboro High School in New York incorporated TikTok memes like VSCO girls — slang for a subculture involving a lifestyle of scrunchies, Hydroflasks and environmentalism *—* into homecoming week theme.