

One of the fastest growing demographic groups on the social networking site Facebook is grownups, people in the age range of 30 to 55. Many teachers are finding out what students have known for a few years: Facebook is a fast, efficient, and fun way to keep in touch with your friends, whether those friends live across town or across the country.

Educators ought to give it a try because Facebook really isn't like anything else you're used to. It's not quite instant messaging, although it is; it's not quite like email, although it is; and it's not quite like a web page, though it is a web page full of info and comments about the people you've chosen as friends.

There are some pitfalls. Some people forget that Facebook is quite public. Although, ASD's assistant superintendent and ASD use Facebook to communicate, because of the casual away-from-school atmosphere, teachers need to be especially cautious about what they post. Also, teachers need to be aware of and perhaps use the privacy settings that allow them to control who can see what content. Therefore, not all groups or the web at large have access to all the information a teacher might post.

Also the most recent version of ASD's "Adult/Student Boundaries," states "Don't use MySpace, online discussion boards and other social networking systems with students."

On the upside, Facebook turns out to be a great place for AEA members to organize. There is a group for Alaska Educators, a group for ASD Staff, and many others. There is a page for teachers who are concerned about returning to a Defined Benefit Retirement to coordinate their communication with legislators. Many local politicians are on Facebook, and there's even a "We Love Carol Comeau for Giving Us a Six Day Weekend in January 2009" Group.

It can be an easy way for people with common interests to get together, and a way to keep track of who is feeling good, who's out of town, who's watching a movie.....all that normal gossip you love about the people you care about. Just remember.....there are millions of people out there, so act accordingly. If you log in you're likely to be one more teacher that comes to school saying, "I was in touch with someone I haven't seen in 15 years!!" If you log on, do a search for the group Anchorage School District, and keep up with people all across the District.