

# State-wide GIS License Supports Technology Education

The Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has signed an agreement that provides all K-12 schools, districts, and formal youth clubs in the state with free access to Esri's ArcGIS software. The agreement aligns with OSPI's approach to technology integration as a multifaceted way to support effective instruction and deepen student understanding of standards-based curricula.

"We've got to teach kids how to analyse information and solve problems," says state school superintendent Randy Dorn. "These are the skills that count in today's world. And we know in the classroom or when students get to do real fieldwork, GIS technology helps kids learn these skills."

Because of the unique ability of GIS to visualise spatial data-making complex concepts clear and understandable-teachers are quick to take advantage of the strong instructional support it provides in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

While the state-wide license is new, individual schools in Washington have been using ArcGIS for several years. Fourth-grade students at Waterville Elementary School study and map the habits of the short-horned lizard (horny toad) as an annual class project. Accomplished through close work with scientists at the University of Washington and local farmers, their efforts have altered the understanding of the region's ecosystem and biodiversity.

"Our STEM educators are excited about several course applications that hold great potential for GIS technology-environmental sustainability and design and the agricultural sciences," says Dennis Small, director of educational technology at OSPI.

"However, most problem-solution activities in the core curricula have a spatial component, so we want to put GIS in the hands of Washington State teachers as a tool that can expand the way kids think about solving a problem."

The state-wide GIS license not only will enhance K-12 education but also is set to become a key software component of the STARS Project, an online system that enables Washington school districts to submit school bus operation data for review and analysis. ArcGIS will manage the calculation and distribution of student transportation funds to the districts based on the state's new funding formula.

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