

Fun with GIS 160: A Billion

by Charlie Fitzpatrick on June 9, 2014

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On May 27, the White House announced Esri's contribution to ConnectED: **ArcGIS Online Organization subscriptions for any K12 school in the US**. Kids in any US school can make maps and analyze data using powerful, professional, web-based GIS, anytime and anywhere connected, on computer, tablet, or smartphone. Since the announcement, three main messages have reached me. First, "You actually expect this to have any impact?" Second, "Sign me up!" Third, "Really? A billion?"

Absolutely, we expect an impact. From Esri president Jack Dangermond on down, my colleagues at Esri are excited about how kids have already used ArcGIS Online, as seen at the [2013 Esri Conference](#) and [schools across the country](#). When educators and education influencers see how powerful it is for kids doing projects, it has an impact.

Hence the "Sign me up!" message. Schools have already requested, received, and started working with ArcGIS Online Orgs. More important, GIS users and education leaders in every state have said "I'm telling my friends, AND my local schools!" The [GIS Certification Institute](#) in particular is encouraging GISPs to be [GeoMentors](#) for local schools. Educators can [build capacity with ArcGIS Online](#) easily, and students even more so. It is important not to set sights too high too quickly, nor stay too low too long ([see model](#)), but good teachers know this.

A word about "projects." [Education Week](#) just published its [annual high school graduation analysis](#), looking at rates across USA. [Note: Chris Swanson, VP of the organization that publishes *Education Week*, will give the initial keynote at [Esri's 2014 Education GIS Conference](#).] Graduation rates are improving, but a huge issue remains; this year's theme is "Motivation Matters." But teachers everywhere report that using GIS helps kids engage more deeply in school, especially in projects. Projects are like "educational Velcro." Wrestling with complex topics, using varied data, in custom situations which are often deeply personal, students work on innumerable little puzzles — countless little hooks. [GIS is STEM](#) (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), and more — communication, collaboration, creativity, and countless topics. When kids use GIS to explore problems, they often show up in the room before school, reappear during lunch, and sometimes must be shooed out the door after the last bell. I've seen it in every kind of school, with kids of all backgrounds, including technophobes, kids with various learning challenges, social butterflies, invisibles, and even those expected to have been mired in "senior slump."

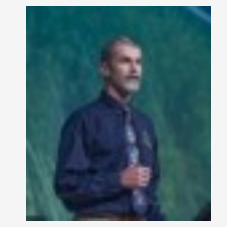


So, we hope every school uses ArcGIS Online. But ... "a billion? Really?" When asked, I have replied "You tell me, what's the dollar value of enticing kids to stay in school? helping them build skills they will carry for a lifetime? helping them see and think geographically and influence their friends and family to do the same? helping them make sound decisions on the basis of a holistic view of a unique and complex situation? supporting the work of millions of kids as they move into [countless careers](#)? And then what's the value of a community that does not get built in a disaster-prone area? or a police force allocating critical resources

where they are needed most? or epidemiologists who can recognize transmission patterns sooner and ward off a pandemic? or businesses who understand optimizing routes? or a billion other situations large and small across the land and over the years?”

Esri’s mission is to help people solve problems by understanding complex situations. We face enormous challenges, as communities, as a nation, as a planet, and only education can solve them. We all need to do our part.

Charlie Fitzpatrick, Esri Education Manager



About Charlie Fitzpatrick

Charlie Fitzpatrick is the K-12 education manager at Esri. Before joining Esri in 1992, Charlie taught social studies in grades 7-12 for 15 years.

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