

Council wants youths to think spatially

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The National Research Council in Washington is urging educators to teach K-12 students to think spatially, using geographic information systems.

Researchers at Northwestern University say they have developed such student-friendly GIS software, giving middle and high school students a taste of real-world science inquiry.

Because geographic information systems are designed for use by scientists and are too complex for classroom use, the NRC report urges the use of GIS software specifically designed to meet the needs of elementary and secondary teachers and students.

"Five years ago, we recognized the need for student-friendly GIS software," said Daniel Edelson, associate professor of education and computer science. His team created My World GIS -- a powerful geographic information system that makes it easy for students to use large data sets to investigate Earth and environmental science phenomena in much the way professional scientists do.

"My World software's unique strength is in enabling students as young as middle school to visualize and analyze geographic data," said Edelson. Published in 2004, My World is already in use in schools across the United States.

The NRC advises the federal government on critical issues in science and technology.

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