1995 COMPOSITE SCHOOL DISTRICT SHAPEFILES: TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION

1.0 Abstract: 1995 Composite School District Shapefile

Data Type
Geography boundary file derived from the Census Bureau's 1995 TIGER\Line database.

Data Content
Elementary, Secondary, and Unified school district boundaries representing the 1989-1990 school year. The boundary file provides a single composite layer that includes all school districts in the United States, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Island Areas.

Data Availability
This school district boundary file was developed from geographic shapefiles created by the U.S. Census Bureau and made available for download by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) through its Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates program.

2.0 School District Overview

School Districts are geographic entities and single purpose governmental units that operate schools and provide public educational services at the local level. The Census Bureau collects school district boundaries to develop annual estimates of children in poverty to help the U.S. Department of Education determine the annual allocation of Title I funding to states and school districts. NCES also uses the school district boundaries to develop a broad collection of district-level demographic estimates from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The Census Bureau updates school district boundaries, names, local education agency codes, grade ranges, and school district levels biennially based on information provided by state education officials.

Universe
The U.S. has more than 13,000 geographically defined public school districts. These include districts that are administratively and fiscally independent of any other government, as well as public school systems that lack sufficient autonomy to be counted as separate governments and are classified as a dependent agency of some other government—a county, municipality, township, or state. Most public school systems are Unified districts that operate regular, special, and/or vocational programs for children in Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten (PK/KG) through 12th grade.

The Census Bureau's school district universe is a subset of the larger NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) Local Education Agency (LEA) universe. The Census collection is limited to regular districts that are geographically defined, and it excludes "non-operating" districts and "educational service agencies" that are part of the CCD LEA universe. These districts primarily exist to collect and transfer tax revenue to other school systems that actually provide the education services, or to provide regional special education services, vocational education programs, or financial services for member districts.

Structure
The Census Bureau assigns all territory in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas to one or more Unified, Elementary, or Secondary school districts based on the general grade range of the schools operated by the district. For example, a district that operates a complete grade range (PK-12th or K-12th) is assigned as Unified, while a district that operates schools for children only in grades KG-8th is classified as Elementary. Elementary and Secondary districts may serve the same territory and have overlapping boundaries, but they are not permitted to overlap boundaries for Unified districts. An exception exists for the State of Hawaii and the five boroughs of New York City where the National School District Program requested that the U.S. Census Bureau include the School Complex Areas in Hawaii (including Middle School Districts) and the Community School Districts in New York City.

The structure of school district geography varies by state and region, and districts that share the name of a county, city, or town or operate schools for these areas may or may not be coterminous with the governmental unit. Districts in the Mid-Atlantic and New England states tend to follow county, township, or city boundaries, while districts in the Midwest, Great Plains, and Western states are generally independent of other municipal boundaries. Likewise, district boundaries may cross boundaries for other statistical geographies like Urban Areas, Metropolitan Areas, Zip Code Tabulation Areas, Census Tracts, and Block Groups.

Grade Range and Fiscal Responsibility

Although school district classifications (Elementary, Secondary, or Unified) generally reflect the grade range of schools operated by district, Census school district classifications are based on the grade range for which the school district is financially responsible, which may or may not be the grade range that a school district operates. For example, Elementary districts typically share territory with one or more Secondary districts that are responsible for operating schools for children in the upper grades. However, some Elementary districts are financially responsible for providing education for all grades, even though the district only operates schools that serve the elementary grades. In these cases, the Elementary district typically contracts with one or more nearby Secondary districts to provide educational services for children in the upper grades. A typical case would be a school district that operates schools for children in grades K-8th, and pays a neighboring school district to educate children in grades 9th–12th. The Elementary district is operationally responsible for grades K-8th, and is therefore classified as an Elementary district. However, since the district is financially responsible for all grades, the Census Bureau would define the grade range for the district as KG-12th.

Spatial Data Format

The Census Bureau distributes school district boundaries formatted as shapefiles, a common industry standard for representing spatial data in points, lines, and polygons. Separate files are provided for Unified, Elementary, and Secondary districts. These data are released annually as geographic layers in the Census Bureau's TIGER/Line database. The district boundary files rely on the five-digit NCES LEAID code as a unique district identifier within states, and in most cases, the code sequence corresponds to the alphabetical order of district names within a state. However, changes over time from the biennial district review program have introduced some exceptions. The code value 99998 is used for some large bodies of water and 99999 is assigned to land where no official school district is defined by a state.

3.0 1995 Census Bureau TIGER/Line Shapefiles

Content, Vintage, and Scope

The 1995 TIGER/Line Shapefiles contain current geography for the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Island areas. Current geography is defined as the latest version of the geographic extent of legally defined geographic areas as reported, generally reflecting the boundaries of governmental units in effect as of January 1, 1995.

Boundary Changes

The 1995 TIGER/Line boundaries for Elementary, Secondary, and Unified school districts are collected through a biennial survey of state education officials under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and are current as of the 1989-1990 school year.

Spatial Accuracy

The Census Bureau uses various internal and external processes to update the MAF/TIGER database and maintain the currency of TIGER/Line boundaries. While it has made a reasonable and systematic attempt to gather the most recent information available about the features in this file, the Census Bureau cautions users that the files are no more complete than the source documents used in their compilation, the vintage of those source documents, and the translation of the information on those source documents.

Sources of Geographic Data

The Census Bureau obtains data from numerous sources to update the MAF/TIGER database. Initially, the Census Bureau used the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 1:100,000-scale Digital Line Graph (DLG), USGS 1:24,000-scale quadrangles, the Census Bureau's 1980 geographic base files (GBF/DIME Files), and a variety of miscellaneous maps for selected areas outside the contiguous 48 states to create the TIGER database (predecessor to the current MAF/TIGER database).

The Census Bureau makes additions and corrections to its database mainly through partner supplied data (federal, state, local, and private partners), the use of aerial imagery, and fieldwork. The Census Bureau has numerous partner programs where federal, state, and local government partners supply updates to boundaries, features, and addresses.

4.0 Structure and Format

Composite Files

The 1995 Composite School District shapefile combines the boundaries of all TIGER/Line school districts (Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Unified) into a single file, rather than four separate layers. This simplifies the task of linking school district boundaries with other types of school district data by eliminating the need to join data to multiple boundary files. Likewise, it simplifies mapmaking by providing wall-to-wall school district geographic coverage for all U.S. territory in a single file.

The TIGER/Line Elementary and Unified district boundaries are generally mutually exclusive, and the combination of the two exhausts the full extent of the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas. Secondary and Elementary districts are usually not mutually exclusive. Most Elementary district boundaries overlap Secondary district boundaries. Although the composite school district file includes all records for both Elementary and Secondary districts, the two types of districts are difficult to visualize at the same time because they often share boundaries. Because Elementary districts are more common than Secondary districts, the composite file places Elementary district boundaries on top of Secondary district boundaries by default, and both on top of Middle district boundaries.

Structure, Format, Naming Conventions

The 1995 composite school district boundaries are offered as a shapefile that is compressed into a ZIP file. The shapefile is a collection of five individual files with separate extensions that function together.

The name of each file is:

SCHOOLDISTRICT_SY8990_TL95.<ext>

Where:

SCHOOLDISTRICT = general descriptor for type of geography

SY8990 = School year 1989-1990

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TL95 = original shapefiles were sourced from TIGER/Line 1995

<ext> = the file extension:

- .shp – the feature geometry
- .shx – the index of the feature geometry
- .dbf – the tabular attribute information
- .sbn – the shape information in rectangles
- .shp.xml – the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) metadata

Datum

The composite shapefile does not include projection information (typically found in a .prj file).

Metadata

The composite school district shapefile includes metadata that describe various characteristics about data quality, purpose, spatial extent, attribute descriptions, valid field values, contact information, and various other features. The metadata file is compatible with a text editor, web browser, and common GIS applications, and are provided in Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, the Federal Geographic Data Committee's (FGDC) Content Standard for digital geospatial metadata (CSDGM) - shp.xml.

RECORD LAYOUT

Composite School District Shapefile Record Layout for SCHOOLDISTRICT_SY8990_TL95

Field	Length	Type	Description
GEOID	7	String	School district identifier; a concatenation of the current state FIPS code and school district local education agency code
STATEFP	2	String	State FIPS code
MISDLEA	5	String	Current middle school district local education agency code
SCSDLEA	5	String	Current secondary school district local education agency code
ELSDLEA	5	String	Current elementary school district local education agency code
UNSDLEA	5	String	Current unified school district local education agency code