Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) Program:

ZIP Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) Locale Assignments File Documentation

ies NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Institute of Education Sciences

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ACRONYMS

EDGE	Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
TIGER	Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing
USPS	United States Postal Service
ZCTA	ZIP Code Tabulation Area

1.0   ZIP Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) locale assignments
The ZCTA Locale file is a table of NCES Locale assignments applied to each of the Census Bureau's ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) included in the TIGER boundaries. The assignments rely on the current NCES Locale boundaries and are based on the locale that accounts for the largest areal proportion of the ZCTA.

2.0   Locale overview
Locale codes are a general geographic indicator developed by the Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) Program to help the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) classify the types of communities where educational institutions are located. The framework includes twelve classifications: four basic types – City, Suburb, Town, Rural – that each contains three subtypes differentiated by population size (in the case of City and Suburban assignments) and proximity (in the case of Town and Rural assignments). The NCES locale framework relies on standard urban and rural definitions developed by the U.S. Census Bureau, and each type of locale is either urban or rural in its entirety. The locales can be fully collapsed into a basic urban–rural dichotomy, or expanded into a more detailed collection of twelve distinct categories. Additional documentation about the NCES locale criteria is available at the NCES EDGE Locale Boundaries website. The NCES classifications and corresponding two-digit locale codes are as follows:

City – Large (11): Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population of 250,000 or more.

City – Midsize (12): Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.

City – Small (13): Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 100,000.

Suburban – Large (21): Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population of 250,000 or more.

Suburban – Midsize (22): Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.

Suburban – Small (23): Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 100,000.

Town – Fringe (31): Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urbanized Area.

Town – Distant (32): Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.

Town – Remote (33): Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.

Rural – Fringe (41): Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Rural – Distant (42): Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Rural – Remote (43): Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Because ZCTAs may contain multiple types of locales, final assignments are based on the locale that accounts for the largest areal proportion of the ZCTA. If a single locale accounts for a majority of the ZCTA area, the ZCTA is assigned the locale. If no single locale accounts for a majority of the area, then the ZCTA is assigned to the basic type that accounts for a majority of the area, and then assigned to the largest subtype within the basic category. If no subtype or basic type accounts for a majority of the ZCTA area, the ZCTA is assigned based on a simple plurality.

3.0   ZCTA overview

3.1   Development
ZIP Code tabulation areas (ZCTAs) are geographic approximations of U.S. Postal Service (USPS) 5-digit ZIP Code service areas that the Census Bureau uses to present statistical data from censuses and surveys. The Census Bureau defines ZCTAs by allocating each census block that contains addresses to a single ZIP Code tabulation area, usually to the ZCTA that reflects the most frequently occurring ZIP Code for the addresses within that block. Blocks that do not contain addresses but are completely surrounded by a single ZIP Code tabulation area (enclaves) are assigned to the surrounding ZCTA; those surrounded by multiple ZCTAs are added to a single ZCTA based on the longest shared border. The Census Bureau identifies 5-digit ZIP Code tabulation areas using a 5-character numeric code that represents the most frequently occurring USPS ZIP Code within that ZCTA. This code may contain leading zeros. The ZCTA boundaries do not offer full nationwide coverage. For additional information on the development and use of ZCTAs, see the Census Bureau's ZCTA page.

3.2   Limitations
The Census Bureau does not update ZCTA boundaries throughout the decade, and this condition poses some limitations for using the ZCTA locale file. First, although the geographic relationship between ZCTA polygons and the extent of ZIP Code service areas is likely to be quite close right after the ZCTAs are first defined, there may be differences between the two. Second, the geographic relationship between ZCTA boundaries and post-decennial USPS ZIP Code service areas may become less reliable over time if USPS adjusts the spatial extent of these areas to improve delivery service. Third, because the ZCTA universe did not include the complete set of USPS ZIP Codes, some ZIP Codes may not have a corresponding match in the ZCTA file. This lack of correspondence may increase over time if USPS retires or introduces new ZIP Codes after the decennial Census. Lastly, the ZCTA delineation process primarily uses residential addresses and is biased towards ZIP Codes used for city-style mail delivery, thus there may be ZIP Codes that cover primarily nonresidential or post office box addresses that may not have a corresponding ZCTA.

4.0   Data source

ZCTA boundaries for the ZCTA Locale file were sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau's TIGER shapefile collection. Current geography in the TIGER shapefiles generally reflects the boundaries of governmental units in effect as of January 1st, and other legal and statistical area boundaries that have been adjusted and/or corrected since the last decennial Census.

5.0   File Format

The ZCTA locale file is provided as a SAS table (edge_zctalocale_YYYY_locale.sas7bdat) and a dBase file (EDGE_ZCTALOCALE_YYYY_LOCALE.dbf), where YYYY represents the TIGER year. In both cases, there is a single file for the United States.

6.0   Record layout

The ZCTA Locale File Record Layout

Field	Length	Type	Description
ZCTA5CEXX	5	String	ZCTA code (where XX represents the year of the last decennial census)
LOCALE	2	String	Locale assignment