

NCES Response to Public Comments Received During the 30-day Public Comment Period Regarding the School Attendance Boundary Survey (SABS) 2013-2015 Data Collection

PUBLIC COMMENT 1 – Government Agency

I was searching for school boundary data and found this web site. When will the data be available to the public--I want to use it in research that I conducting with the CDC. Who do I contact?
What does block rectification mean? I want to geocode data of first grade kids and I want to know if I can use this data to do that. Will it have topology or will it have holes and overlaps? I am worried that the data will not be designed for geocoding.

NCES Response

The school attendance areas are scheduled to be collected during the 2013-14 school year and be released in December of 2014 on the NCES website. Demographic estimates based on those boundaries are planned to be available in 2015. The smallest unit of geography available from Census demographic surveys is a census block, so school area boundaries must be geographically associated with census blocks in order to develop school-level aggregate estimates from Census survey data. School boundaries will be provided as polygons that can be used for a broad range of geographic associations and functions. Point location data can be associated with school attendance areas. The school attendance areas will include grade span data to allow users to identify schools by grade.

PUBLIC COMMENT 2 - Memphis City Schools

I am a planner for Memphis City Public Schools and I friend of mine showed me this web page. I would like to obtain population estimates for public school students who live in each school zone. I think it's important to summarize public school children (otherwise I don't see the point of this project). I would like to this information so I can create enrollment projections. When will the data be available?

NCES Response

The school attendance area geographies will be available at the end of 2014. Survey estimates based on those geographies will be available in 2015. The estimates will not include data disaggregated by school type or individual grade levels, but will provide a variety of other social and economic characteristics at the school attendance area level.

PUBLIC COMMENT 3 – Deer Valley SD Research & Data Analysis

I am a demographer and I draw the zoning maps for the Deer Valley School District. I created separate maps for the K to 6 and 7 to 8 schools since parents would know where to sent their kids to school. But I am getting phone calls from parents because they are looking at the maps that are displayed here: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/ed/>. Parents are confused because they do not see the middle school zones for our district. I see that the middle school zones are missing for the surrounding districts too. Can you please display the grade K to 6 zones AND the grade 7 to 8 zones? And can you provide contact information on the maps too? That way we can email the person who is responsible for them and have changes made when things are wrong.

NCES Response

The school areas currently on <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/ed/> are based on boundaries from the 2009-10 school year. In order to maintain consistency across school districts in this collection, these areas are classified and displayed based on the school type definitions from the Common Core of Data. NCES is also working to develop web-based solutions that will allow local districts to review, edit, create, and submit school attendance area boundaries.

PUBLIC COMMENT 4 – Deer Valley SD Research Office

people are calling our school district because the maps on your web page on wrong. I don't know how it happened, but my school district has school zones that change with grade level: terramar, highland hills, galivan peak and passo hills all have have different zones in the lower grades than they do at the higher grades. can you please correct this mistake.

NCES Response

Thank you for the comment about the 2009-10 school attendance areas. The boundaries displayed on the NCES website are for statistical research purposes and represent the full extent of the school attendance area. Final data files for future collections will be displayed with a note explaining that the boundaries were collected to support research and analysis only, and that questions related to official boundary and enrollment decisions are determined by local school district officials.

PUBLIC COMMENT 5 – A. Nagaraj, Massachuestts Institute of Technology (MIT)

I comment the Department on its efforts to systematically collect data on school attendance boundaries. Imagine doing research on the importance of state policy without accurate geographical information on the population that is affected

by state policies. This is exactly the current state of research in education. While there is plethora of papers that analyze education policy at the level of the state, often the most interesting variation is at the level of the school and existing research cannot capture such variation. Making this data available would allow researchers to greatly expand the kinds of questions that one can pose, and the accuracy and the speed with which response can be gotten.

However, in order for the data to be useful for research it is vital that the data can be flexibly deployed. This entails not just collection of all possible variables that one might be able to collect, but also preserve it in a format that is conducive for manipulation. The cardinal rule of data collection is one where no matter what format is used to preserve the data, one should be able to back out the underlying information with simple manipulations. For example, if school boundaries change by a given year, it is vital that the Department preserve this information as such in the data format that it uses.

I have personally used the format provided by the SABINS project and have found it effective. While it might be slightly cumbersome to store the data in that format at the moment, the benefits to both researchers and practitioners from the availability of detailed micro-data will far outweigh the costs. At the moment, such data is available at a prohibitive cost to researchers from private companies, and if the data collected by the department is not disaggregated sufficiently then we will not be able to capture the benefits of such a project -- because serious users will be forced to turn to private providers. This seems like a needlessly wasteful expenditure, when a s

NCES Response

NCES will release separate boundary files for each survey year. NCES plans to use a flexible data structure to support broad use, and files will be provided in .SHP format so that data can be easily recognized and used by most GIS applications.

PUBLIC COMMENT 6 – V. Chengappa

to whom it may concern. I downloaded the shapefiles of school catchment areas from the sdds web site because i wanted to address-match student data for a couple of the school districts. I can't address-match the data because the catchment areas are piled on top of one another and also because there are holes in the data. I need a map of elementary, middle and high school catchment areas for the entire district and the middle school catchment areas do not cover the entire district. And, it's not possible to create a simple spatial join between address-matched points and catchment areas because the catchment areas overlap. Can you please supply the data to public in conventional format?

NCES Response

Thank you for the comment about the 2009-10 collection. While this clearance addresses the future collections, it is important to know the challenges users have with these complex geographies. School districts commonly operate multiple schools in the same geographic area to serve students in different grade levels, therefore an address may be associated with multiple school areas. School districts may also operate schools with inconsistent grade spans that can cause gaps in coverage of a particular type of school. For example, a district may choose to use an extended K-8th elementary school to serve 6th-8th grades in one specific part of the district, while the remainder of the district is served by middle schools that only provide 6th-8th grades. This functional inconsistency would create a gap in middle school geographic coverage. Location data can be intersected with school attendance area layers to create a one-to-many association. NCES plans to use a flexible data structure to support broad use, and files will be provided in .SHP format so that data can be easily recognized and used by most GIS applications.

PUBLIC COMMENT 7 – V. Gupta

When the U.S. Department of Education tells the public that it is when "a school serves different geographic extents for different grade levels, the school boundary will reflect the modal or largest geographic extent" it is telling the public that is fabricating data. I can't believe--well,actually I can--that the federal government is fabricating data. tsk, tsk.

NCES Response

Large-scale survey collections often involve data generalization. In the rare cases where schools operate different boundaries for different grades served within the same school, the data will be generalized to reflect the most inclusive boundary. This approach minimizes changes needed to represent and use the data, and offers more consistency with the geographic area used to develop demographic estimates.