

Appendix D

NCES LOCALE CODES

NCES Locale codes are derived from a classification system originally developed by NCES in the 1980's to describe a school's location ranging from "large city" to "rural." The codes are based on the physical location represented by an address that is matched against a geographic database maintained by the Census Bureau.

In 2005 and 2006, NCES supported work by the Census Bureau to redesign the original locale codes in light of changes in the U.S. population and the definition of key geographic concepts.

Why did NCES revise its locale code system?

Two developments following the 2000 Decennial Census led to a change in NCES's locale code system. The first was the substantial improvement in geocoding technology that made it possible to locate addresses precisely, using longitude and latitude coordinates.

The second development was a change in the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) definition of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. OMB re-examines and fine-tunes basic geographic concepts and definitions after every decennial Census. The revisions following the 2000 census were more extensive than they had been in 1990 and 1980. OMB introduced a "core based statistical area" system that relied less on population size and county boundaries and more on the proximity of an address to an urbanized area.

The current locale codes found in the Handbooks are based on an address's proximity to an urbanized area (a densely settled core with densely settled surrounding areas). This is a change from the original system based on metropolitan statistical areas. To distinguish the two systems, the new system is referred to as "urban-centric locale codes."

The urban-centric locale code system classifies territory into four major types: city, suburban, town, and rural. Each type has three subcategories. For city and suburb, these are gradations of size—large, midsize, and small. Towns and rural areas are further distinguished by their distance from an urbanized area. They can be characterized as fringe, distant, or remote.

What is the net effect of the change to an urban-centric system?

Compared to the old locale code system, the urban-centric locale codes allow more precision in describing an area. For example, there is a new category for small cities, and rural areas that are truly remote can be distinguished from those closer to an urban core. The urban-centric system places a larger number of addresses in town locales and correspondingly fewer in suburbs/urban fringe. However, the percent of schools that are in city locales does not change much with the urban-centric system. The same is true for the percent of schools in rural locales.

Previous Metro-Centric Locale Codes and Handbook Option Set:

Large City: A central city of a CMSA or MSA, with the city having a population greater than or equal to 250,000.

Mid-size City: A central city of a CMSA or MSA, with the city having a population less than 250,000.

Urban Fringe of a Large City: Any territory within a CMSA or MSA of a Large City and defined as urban by the Census Bureau.

Urban Fringe of a Mid-size City: Any territory within a CMSA or MSA of a Mid-size City and defined as urban by the Census Bureau.

Large Town: An incorporated place or Census-designated place with a population greater than or equal to 25,000 and located outside a CMSA or MSA.

Small Town: An incorporated place or Census-designated place with a population less than 25,000 and greater than or equal to 2,500 and located outside a CMSA or MSA.

Rural, Outside MSA: Any territory designated as rural by the Census Bureau that is outside a CMSA or MSA of a Large or Mid-size City.

Rural, Inside MSA: Any territory designated as rural by the Census Bureau that is within a CMSA or MSA of a Large or Mid-size City.

Current Urban-Centric Locale Codes and Handbook Option Set (Handbook Element #0839 Locale Codes):

City, Large: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.

City, Midsize: 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: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000.

Suburb, Large: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.

Suburb, Midsize: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.

Suburb, Small: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000.

Town, Fringe: Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.

Town, Distant: 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: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.

Rural, Fringe: 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: 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

Rural, Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.