U.S. Department of Education
Office of Inspector General

The Department's Compliance with the Geospatial Data Act

September 24, 2020
ED-OIG/A19U0003

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Statements that managerial practices need improvements, as well as other conclusions and recommendations in this report, represent the opinions of the Office of Inspector General. The appropriate Department of Education officials will determine what corrective actions should be taken.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit Services

September 24, 2020

TO: Dr. Mark Schneider
Director, Institute of Education Sciences

FROM: Bryon S. Gordon /s/
Assistant Inspector General for Audit

SUBJECT: Final Audit Report, "The Department's Compliance with the Geospatial Data Act," Control Number ED-OIG/A19U0003

Attached is the subject final audit report that consolidates the results of our review of The Department's Compliance with the Geospatial Data Act. We have provided an electronic copy to your audit liaison officer. We received your comments responding to our draft report.

U.S. Department of Education policy requires that you develop a final corrective action plan within 30 days of the issuance of this report. The corrective action plan should set forth the specific action items and targeted completion dates necessary to implement final corrective actions on the findings and recommendations contained in this final audit report. Corrective actions that your office proposes and implements will be monitored and tracked through the Department's Audit Accountability and Resolution Tracking System.

In accordance with the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Office of Inspector General is required to report to Congress twice a year on the audits that remain unresolved after 6 months from the date of issuance.

We appreciate your cooperation during this review. If you have any questions, please contact Michele Weaver-Dugan at (202) 245-6941 or Michele.Weaver-Dugan@ed.gov.

Attachment

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Results in Brief

What We Did

The objective of our audit was to review the Department's compliance with the requirements outlined under Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act. Specifically, we determined whether the Department implemented the 13 covered agency responsibilities listed in Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act.

What We Found

We found that the Department is in compliance with the applicable requirements outlined under section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act (Act). Specifically, we found that the Department implemented all 10 of the 13 covered agency responsibilities listed in Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act that we reviewed. We were unable to evaluate compliance with three covered agency responsibilities as the strategic plan applicable to two of the responsibilities has not yet been issued by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) and applicable data standards related to the third responsibility have not yet been defined by the FGDC and Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The Department's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the Institute of Education Sciences is responsible for collecting and maintaining the Department's geospatial data. By assigning an NCES Statistician to head the Department's geospatial data efforts and participating in interagency groups responsible for the development of guidance related to the Geospatial Data Act, the Department has more assurance that it is efficiently managing geospatial data, technologies, and infrastructure. In addition, the NCES Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) program designs and develops information resources to help understand the social and spatial context of education in the United States. NCES uses the EDGE website to maintain and share the Department's geospatial data collected by NCES and the Census Bureau. By coordinating with other agencies and organizations involved with geospatial data, the Department is reducing duplicative efforts and facilitating efficient procurement of geospatial expertise, technology, and services.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Department ensure continued implementation of the covered agency responsibilities listed under Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act, to include remaining aware of any new or updated guidance to assure continued compliance.

Further, we recommend that the Department ensure that Section 759(a)(1), (6), and (10) are implemented once applicable guidance becomes available.

We provided a draft of this audit report to the Institute of Education Sciences for comment. In its response, the Institute of Education Sciences concurred with our recommendations and noted its intent to continue to implement the NCES geospatial data activities consistent with the requirements of the Act.

We did not make any substantive changes to the report as a result of the Institute of Education Sciences' comments. It provided a few minor technical corrections, for which we made corresponding edits. The full text of the Institute of Education Sciences' response is included at the end of this report.

Introduction

Background

The Geospatial Data Act, enacted on October 5, 2018, formalizes governance processes related to geospatial data,[1] provides policy and guidance to empower the use of geospatial data and technology, and facilitates broad cooperation between the public and private sector. The Act reduces duplicative efforts and facilitates the efficient procurement of geospatial expertise, technology, services, and data from the rapidly growing geographic community in the United States. Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act lists 13 responsibilities that covered agencies must fulfill (See Appendix B).

Additionally, the Geospatial Data Act requires the Inspectors General of covered agencies, not less than once every 2 years, to submit to Congress an audit of the collection, production, acquisition, maintenance, distribution, use, and preservation of geospatial data by the covered agency, which shall include a review of— (1) the compliance of the covered agency with the standards for geospatial data, including metadata for geospatial data, established under section 757; (2) the compliance of the covered agency with the requirements under section 759(a); and (3) the compliance of the covered agency on the limitation on the use of Federal funds under section 759A.

NCES is responsible for collecting and maintaining the Department's geospatial data. The NCES EDGE program designs and develops information resources to help understand the social and spatial context of education in the United States. It uses spatial data collected by NCES and the Census Bureau to create geographic locale indicators, school point locations, school district boundaries, and other types of data to support spatial analysis.

Governing Bodies and Guidance

The FGDC is the primary entity for developing, implementing, and reviewing the policies, practices, and standards relating to geospatial data according to the guidelines and requirements issued by OMB. The Geospatial Data Act requires OMB to provide guidance on the implementation of the Act within one year of enactment. To fulfill this requirement, OMB is revising Circular A-16: Coordination of Geographic Information and

[1] Geospatial data is information that is tied to a location on the Earth, including by identifying the geographic location and characteristics of natural or constructed features and boundaries on the Earth, and that is generally represented in vector datasets by points, lines, polygons, or other complex geographic features or phenomena. Geospatial data may be derived from, among other things, remote sensing, mapping, and surveying technologies.

Related Spatial Data Activities, dated August 19, 2002. However, the circular is still under revision as of August 2020.

The National Spatial Data Infrastructure is the technology, policies, criteria, standards, and employees necessary to promote geospatial data sharing throughout the Federal Government, State, tribal, and local governments, and the private sector. The Geospatial Data Act requires the FGDC to lead the development and management and operational decision making for the National Spatial Data Infrastructure strategic plan and geospatial data policy. The National Spatial Data Infrastructure strategic plan provides the basis for covered agency strategies referenced in Section 759(a)(1) of the Geospatial Data Act. FGDC stated that the strategic plan is in development, with final issuance expected by December 31, 2020.

Availability of the Department's Geospatial Data

Section 758 of the Geospatial Data Act states that the FGDC shall operate an electronic service that provides access to geospatial data and metadata for geospatial data to the general public, to be known as the GeoPlatform. The GeoPlatform shall include download access to all open geospatial data directly or indirectly collected by covered agencies. Section 756(b) of the Geospatial Data Act states that, for each National Geospatial Data Asset data theme,[2] the FGDC shall designate one or more covered agencies as the lead covered agency. The lead covered agency for a National Geospatial Data Asset data theme shall be responsible for ensuring the coordinated management of the data, supporting resources, and related services and products of the National Geospatial Data Asset data theme. Additionally, lead covered agencies shall designate a point of contact who shall be responsible for developing, maintaining, coordination relating to, and disseminating data using the GeoPlatform.

We reviewed the GeoPlatform website[3] and found that geospatial data is organized by National Geospatial Data Asset data themes. We found geospatial data relevant to our review under the Governmental Units and Administrative and Statistical Boundaries data theme. Relevant datasets included elementary school districts, unified school districts, and secondary school districts. The GeoPlatform website lists the Census Bureau as the "publisher" of these datasets and the Theme Lead Agency for the Governmental Units and Administrative and Statistical Boundaries data theme. For each dataset, we found links to download individual data files, links to download relevant

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[2] National Geospatial Data Asset data themes are core geospatial datasets that relate to a specific topic or subject.

[3] https://www.GeoPlatform.gov

metadata, and links to the Census Bureau website where the geospatial data can be viewed on an interactive map.

During the course of our review, we learned that the Department's geospatial data is also available on the EDGE program website.[4] Geospatial data available on the EDGE website includes school district boundaries, schools' geographic location indicators, and school attendance boundaries.

Geospatial Data Act Working Group

In February 2020, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) Geospatial Data Act Working Group (Working Group) met to discuss a consensus approach for Inspectors General to use when conducting their inaugural audits. The Working Group identified challenges with conducting the audits as prescribed by the Act and determined it would be in the best interest of the covered agencies for the respective Inspectors General to focus the inaugural Geospatial Data Act audits on the requirement related to covered agency responsibilities outlined in section 759(a). However, given the disparity of geospatial landscapes across the covered agencies, the Working Group noted that this recommended approach does not preclude covered agency Inspectors General from conducting either additional, or more limited audit procedures related to the audit requirements as outlined within the Geospatial Data Act. On March 23, 2020, CIGIE communicated this planned approach to applicable members of Congress (See Appendix C).

[4] https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge

Finding. The Department is in Compliance with the Applicable Requirements Outlined under Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act

We found that the Department implemented all 10 of the 13 covered agency responsibilities under Section 759(a) that we reviewed. We were unable to evaluate compliance with three covered agency responsibilities, specifically requirements (1), (6), and (10).

The following is a summary of the results of our review for each covered agency responsibility under Section 759(a):

(1) – ***Prepare, maintain, publish, and implement a strategy for advancing geographic information and related geospatial data and activities appropriate to the mission of the covered agency, in support of the strategic plan for the National Spatial Data Infrastructure prepared under section 755(c)***

We were unable to determine compliance with this responsibility because the National Spatial Data Infrastructure strategic plan is not yet available. The FGDC does not plan to issue the National Spatial Data Infrastructure strategic plan until December 31, 2020.

(2) – ***Collect, maintain, disseminate, and preserve geospatial data such that the resulting data, information, or products can be readily shared with other Federal agencies and non-Federal users***

NCES uses the EDGE website to maintain and share the Department's geospatial data. Data is available through static downloads as well as through data web services. Users can download raw data files or view the data on an interactive map. This allows any user to access the Department's geospatial data without specialized software. Additionally, geospatial data from previous years is preserved on the EDGE website. We found that the number of previous years maintained on the EDGE website varied for each category of data and noted that some of the data dates back to 1995. NCES stated that all of its geospatial data is kept and used as active files because older geospatial data is still used for research purposes. We noted that the Department's geospatial data is also available on GeoPlatform.gov and Data.gov.

(3) – ***Promote the integration of geospatial data from all sources***

The web services architecture of the EDGE website allows for the integration of data from other agencies and sources. We reviewed the interactive maps available on the EDGE website and found that the Department's geospatial data is combined with

information from other sources such as satellite imagery, congressional districts, urban and metropolitan areas, and opportunity zones.[5]

NCES stated that geospatial datasets can be joined together based on location, which allows the Department to combine its geospatial data assets with data from other sources both inside and outside the government. For example, NCES participated in a "footprint experiment" to determine if school building footprints could be created from existing datasets. NCES combined Microsoft's national structure footprint database, which is a collection of 125 million building footprints that were identified via satellite imagery, with the NCES collection of public school geocodes.[6] As a result, NCES determined that approximately 90 percent of geocodes were contained within a building footprint. This allowed NCES to determine which geocodes need additional review in order to match the building footprint.

(4) – *Ensure that data information products and other records created in geospatial data and activities are included on agency record schedules that have been approved by the National Archives and Records Administration*

The Department is working towards full implementation of this responsibility. The Department's records schedules are being updated in response to OMB Memorandum M-19-21: Transition to Electronic Records, dated June 28, 2019. The draft records schedules are currently in preclearance review with the National Archives and Records Administration. NCES estimates they will be finalized in 6-8 months (winter 2021).

We reviewed the Statistics and Research section of the Department's draft records schedules, including the inventory of all Institute of Education Sciences data. We found that geospatial data is included in this inventory. The draft records schedules state that statistical data and information will be retained for 15 years before transfer to the National Archives. Additionally, the inventory states that all geospatial data will be maintained until the retention policy is approved. We found that geospatial data was not specifically referenced on the Department's records schedules prior to this update. However, as noted above, NCES keeps all geospatial data files as active files because older geospatial data is used for research purposes.

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[5] The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act established opportunity zones to spur private investment in distressed communities throughout the country. Opportunity zones are defined by individual census tract, nominated by America's governors, and certified by the U.S. Secretary of Treasury. Under certain conditions, new investments in opportunity zones may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. There are 8,764 opportunity zones in the United States.

[6] A geocode is the latitude and longitude coordinates for a specific location.

(5) – *Allocate resources to fulfill the responsibilities of effective geospatial data collection, production, and stewardship with regard to related activities of the covered agency, and as necessary to support the activities of the Committee*

Department funds are allocated to the Institute of Education Sciences Statistics program, which includes geospatial data-related activities. This funding supports the collection, analysis, and dissemination of education-related statistics in response to both legislative requirements and the needs of data providers, data users, and educational researchers. The Department's budget for FY 2020 included $110.5 million for the Statistics program. NCES stated that the Department has Full Time Equivalents allocated to the Statistics program, and the NCES Statistician has responsibility for geospatial-related activities. Additionally, we noted that NCES staff represent the Department on the FGDC Steering Committee and an interagency task team. Both groups are responsible for development of guidance related to the Geospatial Data Act.

(6) – *Use the geospatial data standards, including the standards for metadata for geospatial data, and other appropriate standards, including documenting geospatial data with the relevant metadata and making metadata available through the GeoPlatform*

We were unable to evaluate the Department's compliance with this responsibility. The Geospatial Data Act does not explicitly state whether existing data standards are in effect and the FGDC and OMB have not yet provided clarification explaining which data standards, if any, should be followed.

Section 756(b) of the Geospatial Data Act states that lead covered agencies are responsible for providing leadership and facilitating the development and implementation of geospatial data standards for their National Geospatial Data Asset data theme, with a particular emphasis on a data content standard for the National Geospatial Data Asset data theme.

NCES stated that as the lead covered agency for the Governmental Units and Administrative and Statistical Boundaries data theme used by the Department, the Census Bureau is working with the FGDC to develop the data standards. NCES has two Interagency Agreements with the Census Bureau for development of the Department's geospatial data. Therefore, the Census Bureau is creating the standards as well as the data that must meet those standards.

NCES also stated that there are no official standards for the metadata as of August 2020, but metadata cannot be uploaded to cataloging sites such as GeoPlatform.gov and Data.gov unless it meets certain standards.

(7) – *Coordinate and work in partnership with other Federal agencies, agencies of State, tribal, and local governments, institutions of higher education, and the private sector to efficiently and cost effectively collect, integrate, maintain, disseminate, and preserve geospatial data, building upon existing non-Federal geospatial data to the extent possible*

NCES relies on other agencies and sources of information to produce the Department's geospatial data. NCES coordinates with the Census Bureau to produce geospatial data via two Interagency Agreements. According to the Interagency Agreement documentation, NCES relies on geographic data and spatial analysis from the Census Bureau to clarify the context and conditions of education in the United States. These data include geocodes, locale indicators, and administrative boundaries.

In addition, NCES works with agencies of State and local governments, institutions of higher education, and the private sector to collect and build upon non-Federal geospatial data through the use of nationally representative and local level surveys. NCES uses survey data to assign geocodes for schools and school district administrative offices and determine the relationship between school district boundaries and other statistical boundaries such as counties and Congressional Districts.

We also noted that NCES hosts an annual Summer Data Forum and Conference. The Forum is comprised of representatives from state and local educational agencies, the federal government, and other organizations with an interest in education data. The NCES Statistician is listed as a presenter for two sessions at the most recent conference held in July 2019, providing participants with an overview of NCES data tools that can be used to access data sets and EDGE website applications that can be used to explore the social and spatial context of education.

As noted above, NCES uses the EDGE website to maintain and share the Department’s geospatial data. In addition, the Census Bureau has published the Department’s geospatial data on Geoplatform.gov.

(8) – *Use geospatial information to— (A) make Federal geospatial information and services more useful to the public; (B) enhance operations; (C) support decision making; and (D) enhance reporting to the public and to Congress*

The NCES EDGE website makes the Department's geospatial data available to the public through an interactive map, so that users without specialized software can access it. As discussed under responsibility (7) above, NCES staff hold an annual data conference that includes demonstrations of the ways the Department’s geospatial data can be used.

Additionally, we found that the EDGE website describes the information found in each category of geospatial data and gives examples of how the data can enhance operations and support decision making. Examples provided include school district boundaries, schools' geographic location indicators, and school attendance boundaries.

We found examples of reports to the public and to Congress produced by the Department that incorporate geospatial data, including:

- The National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as The Nation's Report Card, is a statutorily mandated assessment of academic progress among the states and in large urban school systems. NCES stated that this assessment depends on data assignments derived from latitude/longitude values and locale polygons to fulfill its assessment and reporting mandates.

- NCES's annual Conditions of Education publication fulfills a congressionally mandated reporting requirement. This publication provides information about the conditions of students and schools in different types of geographic areas. NCES stated that this information depends on school and school district locale assignments.

- Title I allocations are based on poverty estimates developed by the Census Bureau, which require the definition and development of school district boundaries.

- The Every Student Succeeds Act directed the Department to produce a report for Congress that explained how Title I allocations varied by geographic locale. NCES stated that this report depended on multiple types of geospatial data, including school point locations, locale boundaries, and school district boundaries.

- The Department's College Scorecard project provides data to help students and families compare college costs and outcomes. NCES stated that the College Scorecard incorporates basic indicators such as locale boundaries and the geographic location of postsecondary institutions.

(9) – *Protect personal privacy and maintain confidentiality in accordance with Federal policy and law*

The Department's geospatial data does not include personally identifiable information. The data mainly consists of school locations and boundaries. No personally identifiable information is collected.

We did note that the Interagency Agreements between the Department and the Census Bureau include standard language regarding protection of personal information and maintaining confidentiality. NCES stated that the Census Bureau takes these issues very seriously.

(10) – *Participate in determining, when applicable, whether declassified data can contribute to and become a part of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure*

We were unable to determine compliance with this responsibility because the National Spatial Data Infrastructure strategic plan is not yet available. The FGDC does not plan to issue the National Spatial Data Infrastructure strategic plan until December 31, 2020.

(11) – *Search all sources, including the GeoPlatform, to determine if existing Federal, State, local, or private geospatial data meets the needs of the covered agency before expending funds for geospatial data collection*

NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States. The scope of the Department's geospatial data is relatively small and specialized around schools and school districts. NCES stated that the Department's geospatial data is very specific information that is only produced in collaboration with the Census Bureau, using existing survey and census data. We noted that all of the geospatial data related to education available on Geoplatform.gov and Data.gov was published by NCES and the Census Bureau.

(12) – *To the maximum extent practicable, ensure that a person receiving Federal funds for geospatial data collection provides high-quality data*

The Department does not have any private contracts for the development or collection of geospatial data. As noted above, the Department's geospatial data is produced in collaboration with the Census Bureau. We noted that the Interagency Agreement documentation states that the Census Bureau will follow NCES statistical and publication standards.

(13) – *Appoint a contact to coordinate with the lead covered agencies for collection, acquisition, maintenance, and dissemination of the National Geospatial Data Asset data themes used by the covered agency*

NCES stated that the NCES Statistician is the contact for coordination with the Census Bureau (the lead for the data theme used by the Department). We noted that the NCES Statistician is listed as a point of contact on the Interagency Agreement documentation.

Overall, we found that the Department has been successful in its implementation of the covered agency responsibilities because its efforts in the area of geospatial data are well informed and largely headed by the NCES Statistician. The NCES Statistician's position is specifically dedicated to geospatial data and related activities. We noted that the NCES Statistician specializes in education and census geography, locale codes, school geocodes, and school and school district geography. In addition, the NCES Statistician

serves as the designated point of contact for coordination with the lead covered agency and the Interagency Agreements.

We also found that NCES staff have been involved with interagency groups responsible for development of guidance related to the Geospatial Data Act. Participation in these groups helped NCES understand and implement the requirements of the Act. The NCES Commissioner represents the Department on the FGDC Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is a policy-level interagency group responsible for providing leadership and direction in support of OMB Circular A-16 related activities, and the development of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure. The goal of the Steering Committee is to work with OMB to help develop regulations related to the Geospatial Data Act, including an update to Circular A-16.

The NCES Statistician served on an interagency task team established by the Steering Committee that conducted an initial impact assessment of the Act and developed an approach to implementation. This team included four work groups which were tasked with evaluating sections of the Act and identifying recommendations and questions for the revision of OMB Circular A-16. The NCES Statistician participated in the Section 759 work group.

By implementing the covered agency responsibilities listed in Section 759(a), the Department is furthering the goals of the Geospatial Data Act, which helps to ensure that it is efficiently managing geospatial data, technologies, and infrastructure. By coordinating with other agencies and organizations involved with geospatial data, the Department is reducing duplicative efforts and facilitating efficient procurement of geospatial expertise, technology, and services.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Director for the Institute of Education Sciences:

1.1 Ensure that the Department continues to implement the covered agency responsibilities listed under Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act, to include remaining aware of any new or updated guidance to assure continued compliance.

1.2 Ensure that the Department implements Section 759(a)(1), (6), and (10) once applicable guidance becomes available.

Institute of Education Sciences Comments

The Institute of Education Sciences stated that the NCES Commissioner and staff will continue to be actively involved with the FGDC and its committees and working groups to ensure that NCES is aware of any new or updated guidance to ensure that it complies with the Department's responsibilities under the Geospatial Data Act.

Regarding Section 759(a)(1), the Institute of Education Sciences noted that the NCES Commissioner is part of the steering committee developing drafts of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure. It stated that all Department activities are aligned with the most recent draft, and that the NCES Statistician and Commissioner will both have the opportunity to review and comment on any changes which may result in a loss of alignment between current Department activities and the final National Spatial Data Infrastructure.

The Institute of Education Sciences reiterated that NCES is working closely with the Census Bureau to develop the geospatial assets of the Department. It stated that, since the Census Bureau is the lead covered agency for the Governmental Units and Administrative and Statistical Boundaries data theme and is responsible for developing the standards for the theme referenced in Section 759(a)(6), all products produced by Census on the behalf of NCES will be updated as the standards for the data theme are developed.

Finally, the Institute of Education Sciences stated that the Department does not have and does not foresee having declassified data relevant to the geospatial data sets. Therefore, once the National Spatial Data Infrastructure standards are published, the Department will have no materials which fall under Section 759(a)(10).

OIG Response

OIG appreciates the efforts the Institute of Education Sciences has taken and plans to take to ensure that the Department is in compliance with Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act.

Appendix A. Scope and Methodology

To answer our objective, we gained an understanding of the Department's implementation of Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act. We reviewed applicable laws, legislation, directives, and other regulatory criteria and guidance related to the Department's responsibilities under the Geospatial Data Act. In addition, we conducted interviews of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) officials and staff responsible for the Department's geospatial data. We also reviewed prior Office of Inspector General, Government Accountability Office, and other Federal agencies' audit reports related to our audit objective.

Implementation of Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act

We met with NCES officials to discuss the Department's implementation of Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act. We obtained copies of meeting minutes, presentations, and email correspondence related to the Department's implementation of the Geospatial Data Act. We reviewed geospatial data available on the Department's Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) website, as well as GeoPlatform.gov and Data.gov. We obtained documentation of the Department's Interagency Agreements with the Census Bureau. We reviewed the draft update to the Department's records schedules, including an inventory of the Department's statistics and research records. Finally, we reviewed a selection of reports to the public and Congress that incorporate the Department's geospatial data.

Use of Computer-Processed Data

While we reviewed electronic platforms such as the EDGE website, GeoPlatform.gov and Data.gov, we did not utilize the data itself and instead focused on the data's existence. Therefore, we determined that an assessment of the reliability of computer-processed data was not required.

We conducted fieldwork at Department offices in Washington, D.C., from May 2020 through August 2020. We provided our audit results to Institute of Education Sciences officials during an exit conference conducted on August 20, 2020.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

Appendix B. Section 759(a) – Covered Agency Responsibilities

Sec. 759 Covered Agency Responsibilities

(a) Each covered agency shall:

(1) prepare, maintain, publish, and implement a strategy for advancing geographic information and related geospatial data and activities appropriate to the mission of the covered agency, in support of the strategic plan for the National Spatial Data Infrastructure prepared under section 755(c);

(2) collect, maintain, disseminate, and preserve geospatial data such that the resulting data, information, or products can be readily shared with other Federal agencies and non-Federal users;

(3) promote the integration of geospatial data from all sources;

(4) ensure that data information products and other records created in geospatial data and activities are included on agency record schedules that have been approved by the National Archives and Records Administration;

(5) allocate resources to fulfill the responsibilities of effective geospatial data collection, production, and stewardship with regard to related activities of the covered agency, and as necessary to support the activities of the Committee;

(6) use the geospatial data standards, including the standards for metadata for geospatial data, and other appropriate standards, including documenting geospatial data with the relevant metadata and making metadata available through the GeoPlatform;

(7) coordinate and work in partnership with other Federal agencies, agencies of State, tribal, and local governments, institutions of higher education, and the private sector to efficiently and cost effectively collect, integrate, maintain, disseminate, and preserve geospatial data, building upon existing non- Federal geospatial data to the extent possible;

(8) use geospatial information to—

(A) make Federal geospatial information and services more useful to the public;

(B) enhance operations;

(C) support decision making; and

(D) enhance reporting to the public and to Congress;

(9) protect personal privacy and maintain confidentiality in accordance with Federal policy and law;

(10) participate in determining, when applicable, whether declassified data can contribute to and become a part of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure;

(11) search all sources, including the GeoPlatform, to determine if existing Federal, State, local, or private geospatial data meets the needs of the covered agency before expending funds for geospatial data collection;

(12) to the maximum extent practicable, ensure that a person receiving Federal funds for geospatial data collection provides high-quality data; and

(13) appoint a contact to coordinate with the lead covered agencies for collection, acquisition, maintenance, and dissemination of the National Geospatial Data Asset data themes used by the covered agency.

Appendix C. Communication of Planned Audit Approach

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Roger F. Wicker
Chairman
The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Chairwoman, and Ranking Members:

The Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) recognizes and appreciates your leadership on issues of geospatial data. In particular, we believe the enactment of the Geospatial Data Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-254) will improve the continuing development of geospatial data and technology. To make sure this happens, the Geospatial Data Act provides for oversight by way of the Federal Inspectors General. Specifically, the Geospatial Data Act requires the bi-annual completion of a review of Covered Agencies' compliance with standards established by the Act, Covered Agencies' responsibilities detailed in the Act, and Covered Agencies' compliance with the prohibition of Federal funding for non-compliant datasets.

We are writing this letter on behalf of CIGIE to inform you of an important distinction with the inaugural Geospatial Data Act audits by the Inspector General community. Specifically, the inaugural mandatory audit scope period overlaps with the estimated Geospatial Data Act implementation period established by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC). As part of the implementation phase, the FGDC is evaluating the existing body of standards, among other items. Due to the continuing implementation of the Geospatial Data Act, conducting the mandatory audits as prescribed by the Act would result in reports submitted by the Inspectors General in October 2020 to be inconclusive for two of the three audit requirements.

To address this challenge while continuing to meet the mandatory audit requirements, CIGIE convened a working group with representatives from the Covered Agency Inspectors General to reach a consensus on an audit approach for the inaugural audits. The Covered Agency Inspectors General determined that audits focused on the Covered Agencies' progress toward compliance with the Geospatial Data Act, including the agencies' compliance with requirements under

subsection (a), would likely provide the best value to the Covered Agencies', Congress, and the Public. This is a somewhat narrower approach than what the law requires, because it is currently difficult to determine which standards the audits should use in evaluating compliance. Also, because the law establishes a five-year implementation period before limiting the use of Federal funds for non-compliant activities, this requirement would not be evaluated in the inaugural audits.

This consensus approach will afford each Covered Agency Inspector General latitude to perform additional testing based on the Covered Agency's geospatial footprint as determined necessary by the applicable Inspector General. CIGIE has advised the affected Inspectors General that should they decide to perform either additional, or more limited procedures, the rationale for the addition, or reduction of the audit procedures should be included in the report.

Should you or your staffs have any questions about our approach or other aspects of our collective Geospatial Data Act oversight activities, please do not hesitate to contact us at (202) 514-3435 or (703) 248-2296 respectively. Sincerely,

Michael E. Horowitz
Chair, Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency
Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice

Tammy L. Whitcomb
Chair, Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, Technology Committee
Inspector General, U.S. Postal Service

cc: The Honorable Ron Johnson, Chairman
The Honorable Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney, Chairwoman
The Honorable Mark Meadows, Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Margaret Weichert, Deputy Director OMB and Executive Chair, Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency

The Honorable Gene Dodaro, Comptroller General, GAO

Appendix D. Acronyms and Abbreviations

CIGIE	Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency
Department	U.S. Department of Education
EDGE	Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates
FGDC	Federal Geographic Data Committee
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
OMB	Office of Management and Budget

Institute of Education Sciences Comments

550 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20202

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 10, 2020

TO: Ms. Michele Weaver-Dugan
Regional Inspector General for Audit
Internal Operations/Philadelphia Audit Team
Office of Inspector General

FROM: Dr. Mark Schneider
Director
Institute of Education Sciences

SUBJECT: Draft Audit Report, "The Department's Compliance with the Geospatial Data Act," Control Number ED-OIG-A19U0003

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) September 9, 2020, draft audit report, "The Department's Compliance with the Geospatial Data Act" (ED-OIG/A19U0003). The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) appreciates the work that went into the draft report and the professional and cooperative manner demonstrated by the audit team while working with our staff.

We have reviewed the draft report and appreciate OIG's finding that the Department is in compliance with the applicable requirements outlined under section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act. We intend to continue to implement the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) geospatial data activities consistent with the requirements of the Act.

Recommendation 1.1 Ensure that the Department continues to implement the covered agency responsibilities listed under Section 759(a) of the Geospatial Data Act, to include remaining aware of any new or updated guidance to assure continued compliance.

IES Response: We concur with this recommendation. The NCES Commissioner and staff will continue to be actively involved with the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) and its committees and working groups to ensure that NCES is aware of any new or updated guidance to ensure that we comply with the Department's responsibilities under the Geospatial Data Act.

Recommendation 1.2 Ensure that the Department implements Section 759(a)(1), (6), and (10) once applicable guidance becomes available.

IES Response: We concur with this recommendation.

As to 759(a)(1), the NCES Commissioner is part of the steering committee developing drafts of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). All Department activities are aligned with the most recent draft. The NCES Commissioner and Statistician will both have the opportunity to review and comment on any changes which may result in a loss of alignment between current Department activities and the final NSDI.

As stated in the report, NCES is working closely with the Census Bureau to develop the geospatial assets of the Department. Since the Census Bureau is the lead covered agency for the Governmental Units and Administrative and Statistical Boundaries data theme and is responsible for developing the standards for the theme referenced in 759(a)(6), all products produced by Census on the behalf of NCES will be updated as the standards for the data theme are developed.

The Department does not have and does not foresee having declassified data relevant to the geospatial data sets. Therefore, once the NSDI standards are published, the Department will have no materials which fall under 759(a)(10).

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the draft audit report.

Enclosure