

Structuring College Access: The Market Segment Model and College Board Geo-markets

1 PROPOSAL

BACKGROUND, RESEARCH QUESTIONS. In 1983, Zemsky and Oedel authored *The Structure of College Choice*. Based on an analysis of 1980 SAT score-sending behavior and published by *The College Board*, Zemsky & Oedel (1983) developed the Market Segment Model and created “Geomarkets.” The Market Segment Model predicts how demand for a particular institution varies across geographic regions based on household/student characteristics of geographic regions.

Geomarkets are geographic borders that disaggregate states and large metropolitan areas into “community-based enrollment markets” (Zemsky & Oedel, 1983, p. 14) for recruiting purposes. Figure 1 shows New York City area Geomarkets. Geomarkets are the basis for the College Board Enrollment Planning Service (EPS), founded in 1984 and still active today. EPS software recommends which Geomarkets a college should recruit from and which schools/communities they should prioritize within targeted Geomarkets.¹

Geomarkets were incorporated into the *College Board* “student list” product named Student Search Service. Student lists have been the primary source of lead generation in U.S. higher education for over 50 years (Belkin, 2019; Jaquette, Salazar, & Martin, 2022).² Lists contain contact information for prospective students. The Student Search Service database consists of College Board test-takers. Colleges pay a fee for each prospect (e.g., \$0.50). Colleges control which prospect profiles they purchase by selecting search filters, such as high school graduation year, SAT score, AP score, state, etc. Geomarket filters enable colleges to include/exclude prospects from particular Geomarkets. An analysis of 830 student lists purchased by 14 public universities found that 16% of purchases filtered on Geomarket (Jaquette & Salazar, 2024).

We argue that Geomarket borders are substantially correlated with class and race. This correlation is partly intentional. Zemsky & Oedel (1983) viewed student demand as a function of class. Zemsky & Oedel (1983) sought to create Geomarkets that contained many high SES students willing to attend colleges far from home, for example “CT 3–Fairfield County.” When colleges use the Market Segment Model, “the result is a natural reinforcing of the basic socioeconomic patterns that gave shape in the first place to the structure of college choice” (Zemsky & Oedel, 1983, p. 44). Considering the nature of U.S. segregation (Rothstein, 2017), Geomarkets may also be correlated with race.

We draw from “quantification” scholarship in sociology (Espeland & Stephens, 2008; McArthur & Reeves, 2022) and data studies (Chun, 2021; O’Neil, 2016). To the extent that Geomarket borders are correlated with class and race, student list purchases that filter on Geomarkets can yield systematic socioeconomic and racial exclusion in college opportunity (Harcourt, 2007). We address two research questions:

1. What is the socioeconomic and racial variation between Geomarkets in metropolitan areas?
How does this variation change over time?
2. How does the socioeconomic and racial composition of included versus excluded prospects vary when student list purchases filter on particular Geomarkets?

Scholarship has not observed the mechanisms by which enrollment management products structure college access, funneling certain students to certain institutions. Showing how these products facilitate exclusion introduces new avenues for scholarship and policy discourse.

¹In 1995, 37% of 4-year public institutions and 49% of 4-year private institutions used EPS (Noel-Levitz, 1998).

²Ruffalo Noel-Levitz (2022) reported that 87% of private and 86% of public four-year institutions purchase student lists.

DATA SOURCES. To answer RQ1, we utilize census tract-level data from the 1980 Decennial Census, 2000 Decennial Census, and 2020 5-year American Community Survey (ACS). Variables of interest include: race/ethnicity; mean and median household income; percent of households below poverty line; and BA attainment of people aged 25+. We obtained shapefiles for College Board Geomarkets from a 2012 *R-bloggers* post. We assigned census tracts to Geomarkets by implementing a partial spatial join.³

To answer RQ2, we issued public records requests about student lists purchased by 14 public universities from 2016 through 2020. For 414 College Board student list purchases, associated with about 2.6 million prospects, we received both (1) the order summary – showing which search filters were utilized – and (2) the de-identified prospect-level data, including race, ethnicity, zip code, and high school. Figure 2 shows the partial order summary, which we converted to tabular data, for a purchase by Arizona State University that filtered on the 2020 high school graduating class, PSAT scores of 1070 to 1180, and selected Geomarkets.⁴

METHOD. The methods are simultaneously descriptive and spatial. We utilize a case study design in which metropolitan areas are cases. Like Salazar (2022), we envision focusing on 2-4 metropolitan areas, including the historical context of segregation and gentrification. An appendix will show results for a larger number of metropolitan areas.

To answer RQ1, we produce tables/graphs that show how Geomarkets around a metropolitan area vary on racial and socioeconomic characteristics and how they vary over time. We produce interactive maps at the census tract-level to show more granular variation within and between Geomarkets. We address RQ2 by analyzing actual student list purchases that encompass all Geomarkets around a given metropolitan area, showing which prospects would have been excluded/excluded had the purchase filtered on particular Geomarkets.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS. We are currently writing functions that create tables and/or maps for the metropolitan area chosen by the function call.

For RQ1, Table 1 shows racial and socioeconomic characteristics for Geomarkets around Chicago. Figure 3 is a screenshot of an interactive choropleth map of Los Angeles, showing Geomarket borders and the tract-level %Hispanic in 2020. Figure 4 shows tract-level median household income around Los Angeles.

Results for RQ2 show how many purchased prospects from each racial/ethnic group live in each Geomarket. These prospects would have been excluded had the purchase filtered on Geomarkets and not selected that Geomarket. Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4, respectively, show counts, column percentages, and row percentages for the Philadelphia metropolitan area, based on a purchase that filters on students from the 2020 high school class who scored between 1070 and 1180 on the PSAT. Table 3 shows that “PA5–Philadelphia County” contains 15% of all purchased prospect profiles but 44% of Black prospects, indicating that opportunity for Black students is sensitive to the inclusion of this Geomarket. Figure 5 is a screenshot of a (very) preliminary interactive map for this purchase, with marker size indicating the number of purchased prospect profiles who attended that high school and separate markers by race/ethnicity.

³Census tracts that intersected multiple Geomarkets were partially assigned based on the proportion of land area. Currently, our spatial join for the 2020 ACS is causing some invalid geometries that we will fix prior to AEFP.

⁴Analyses for RQ2 additionally utilize data on public and private high schools from NCES.

2 References

- Belkin, D. (2019). For sale: SAT-Takers' names. Colleges buy student data and boost exclusivity. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/for-sale-sat-takers-names-colleges-buy-student-data-and-boost-exclusivity-11572976621>
- Chun, W. H. K. (2021). *Discriminating data: Correlation, neighborhoods, and the new politics of recognition* (pp. xi, 327 pages). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Espeland, W. N., & Stephens, M. L. (2008). A sociology of quantification. *Archives Européennes De Sociologie*, 49(3), 397–432. Retrieved from <Go to ISI>://WOS:000265147000002
- Harcourt, B. E. (2007). *Against prediction: Profiling, policing, and punishing in an actuarial age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jaquette, O., & Salazar, K. G. (2024). A sociological analysis of structural racism in “student list” lead generation products. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 46(2), 276–308. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737231210894>
- Jaquette, O., Salazar, K. G., & Martin, P. (2022). *The student list business: Primer and market dynamics*. The Institute for College Access and Success. Retrieved from https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/The-Student-List-Business_-Primer-and-Market-Dynamics.pdf
- McArthur, D., & Reeves, A. (2022). The unintended consequences of quantifying quality: Does ranking school performance shape the geographical concentration of advantage?¹. *American Journal of Sociology*, 128(2), 515–551. <https://doi.org/10.1086/722470>
- Noel-Levitz. (1998). *National enrollment management survey: Findings for fall 1997 four-year institutions*. Noel-Levitz.
- O’Neil, C. (2016). *Weapons of math destruction: How big data increases inequality and threatens democracy* (First edition.). New York: Crown.
- Rothstein, R. (2017). *The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America*. Liveright Publishing.
- Ruffalo Noel-Levitz. (2022). *2022 marketing and recruitment practices for undergraduate students report*. Ruffalo Noel-Levitz. Retrieved from <https://www.ruffalonl.com/papers-research-higher-education-fundraising/marketing-and-recruitment-practices-for-undergraduate-students/>
- Salazar, K. G. (2022). Recruitment redlining by public research universities in the los angeles and dallas metropolitan areas. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 93, 585–621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2021.2004811>
- Zemsky, R., & Oedel, P. (1983). *The structure of college choice / robert zemsky, penney oedel*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board.

3 Appendix

Table 1: Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics of Geomarkets around Chicago-land

Geomarket name	2000					2020				
	Mean	SD	P25	P50	P75	Mean	SD	P25	P50	P75
% White, non-Hispanic										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	73.0	26.6	59.2	86.2	91.6	58.7	26.5	38.2	68.2	81.2
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	77.3	15.9	67.7	82.7	89.2	61.5	19.5	46.7	65.2	75.4
IL 9, North Shore	84.2	12.7	77.8	90.2	93.2	74.2	16.1	60.8	78.8	86.9
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	73.8	19.2	65.7	77.1	89.1	63.7	18.6	52.6	65.7	78.7
IL11, City of Chicago	32.2	32.6	1.2	20.2	62.5	32.8	29.5	3.3	26.2	60.4
IL12, Western Suburbs	68.3	25.3	55.8	78.3	86.5	55.6	25.6	39.3	60.6	76.0
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	65.5	30.8	40.1	80.1	90.9	53.4	30.4	24.1	59.8	79.7
% Black, non-Hispanic										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	7.6	14.2	0.7	1.5	7.6	7.6	10.7	0.7	2.3	10.4
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	2.0	2.2	0.6	1.2	2.6	3.0	3.9	0.5	1.8	3.9
IL 9, North Shore	2.2	5.6	0.4	0.9	1.5	2.6	4.5	0.2	1.1	2.7
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	7.0	14.7	0.3	0.9	4.0	6.7	10.7	0.8	2.2	7.7
IL11, City of Chicago	40.2	42.7	1.8	13.3	96.2	32.9	38.2	2.1	8.0	77.0
IL12, Western Suburbs	9.3	20.6	0.9	2.0	5.3	9.3	16.9	1.5	3.8	8.5
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	22.7	29.8	0.7	5.7	38.6	23.8	29.6	2.2	8.4	38.5
% Hispanic										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	14.3	18.0	3.0	5.4	17.8	23.5	21.5	6.4	13.7	36.2
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	11.1	12.4	3.3	6.1	12.5	18.2	17.6	6.1	11.8	23.8
IL 9, North Shore	5.5	8.4	1.6	2.5	3.5	7.9	9.6	2.4	4.7	9.7
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	5.9	5.1	2.9	4.4	7.2	10.0	7.4	4.7	8.5	12.6
IL11, City of Chicago	21.9	27.6	1.5	7.4	34.3	25.8	27.9	4.8	13.7	39.0
IL12, Western Suburbs	15.9	20.2	3.6	6.5	18.7	23.4	24.4	5.8	13.9	31.1
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	8.9	10.9	3.1	4.9	9.3	17.9	16.7	6.6	12.4	23.0
% API, non-Hispanic										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	3.5	3.6	1.0	2.1	4.7	7.4	8.3	1.7	4.9	9.9
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	8.1	6.3	3.0	7.0	11.1	14.8	11.3	6.2	12.4	21.3
IL 9, North Shore	7.0	6.6	2.4	4.7	7.7	12.6	9.9	4.4	9.4	17.6
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	11.1	9.0	3.2	7.2	18.8	16.0	11.8	5.7	12.3	25.9
IL11, City of Chicago	4.0	8.7	0.1	0.8	3.8	6.1	9.9	0.0	2.3	7.9
IL12, Western Suburbs	5.1	4.6	1.7	3.6	7.2	9.2	9.4	2.2	6.0	13.5
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	1.3	1.6	0.4	0.9	1.7	2.8	4.9	0.1	1.1	3.1
% Native, non-Hispanic										

Table 1: Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics of Geomarkets around Chicago-land (*continued*)

Geomarket name	2000					2020				
	Mean	SD	P25	P50	P75	Mean	SD	P25	P50	P75
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
IL 9, North Shore	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
IL11, City of Chicago	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
IL12, Western Suburbs	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
% two+ races, non-Hispanic										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	1.2	0.6	0.8	1.1	1.5	2.3	2.1	1.0	1.8	3.2
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	1.3	1.2	0.8	1.1	1.5	2.1	1.9	1.0	1.7	2.7
IL 9, North Shore	1.0	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.2	2.3	2.0	1.0	1.8	3.0
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	1.9	1.2	0.9	1.6	2.7	3.2	2.2	1.6	2.5	4.4
IL11, City of Chicago	1.4	1.2	0.6	1.1	1.9	2.1	2.2	0.3	1.5	3.0
IL12, Western Suburbs	1.3	1.0	0.8	1.1	1.5	2.1	1.9	0.7	1.7	2.9
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	1.3	0.8	0.8	1.2	1.6	1.9	1.9	0.6	1.4	2.8
Median income										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	131.0	50.0	99.0	119.0	160.0	116.0	52.0	78.0	106.0	144.0
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	129.0	39.0	104.0	119.0	143.0	115.0	37.0	87.0	109.0	136.0
IL 9, North Shore	189.0	74.0	142.0	179.0	216.0	170.0	71.0	117.0	164.0	211.0
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	123.0	40.0	96.0	115.0	146.0	116.0	44.0	84.0	116.0	141.0
IL11, City of Chicago	72.0	35.0	50.0	71.0	88.0	79.0	43.0	50.0	69.0	100.0
IL12, Western Suburbs	117.0	39.0	89.0	113.0	137.0	113.0	46.0	81.0	104.0	137.0
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	99.0	29.0	78.0	96.0	115.0	93.0	36.0	66.0	87.0	118.0
Mean income										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	159.0	70.0	109.0	136.0	192.0	143.0	64.0	95.0	131.0	179.0
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	157.0	59.0	120.0	138.0	172.0	140.0	47.0	105.0	131.0	164.0
IL 9, North Shore	273.0	122.0	185.0	256.0	318.0	242.0	107.0	159.0	225.0	312.0
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	159.0	61.0	121.0	139.0	188.0	162.0	69.0	114.0	152.0	188.0
IL11, City of Chicago	96.0	46.0	68.0	88.0	110.0	107.0	60.0	66.0	90.0	129.0
IL12, Western Suburbs	143.0	55.0	105.0	132.0	165.0	141.0	62.0	100.0	126.0	170.0
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	116.0	35.0	93.0	110.0	133.0	111.0	40.0	81.0	105.0	137.0
% in poverty										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	5.8	5.9	2.0	4.3	6.7	8.7	7.9	3.3	6.6	11.2
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	3.7	2.6	1.8	3.1	4.9	6.9	4.8	3.8	5.8	9.3

Table 1: Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics of Geomarkets around Chicago-land (*continued*)

Geomarket name	2000					2020				
	Mean	SD	P25	P50	P75	Mean	SD	P25	P50	P75
IL 9, North Shore	2.9	2.2	1.4	2.1	3.6	6.2	6.0	2.4	4.1	7.5
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	5.7	5.9	2.6	3.9	5.9	8.5	6.7	4.0	6.9	10.8
IL11, City of Chicago	20.0	15.7	8.2	15.3	29.0	17.7	12.2	8.4	14.8	24.0
IL12, Western Suburbs	5.7	5.4	2.5	4.1	7.0	8.0	6.0	3.7	6.5	10.9
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	8.0	7.6	3.4	5.6	9.4	10.6	8.7	4.4	8.5	14.9
% with BA+										
IL 7, Chain of Lakes	32.7	20.1	15.7	30.0	52.2	39.6	22.8	19.0	35.4	58.7
IL 8, Northwest Suburbs	36.3	14.4	26.4	34.6	46.9	45.2	16.2	32.4	44.1	56.3
IL 9, North Shore	59.7	17.5	50.7	63.0	72.2	68.0	18.2	58.3	73.6	81.3
IL10, Evanston & Skokie	46.5	17.7	33.6	42.2	59.9	57.6	16.8	45.9	55.6	71.7
IL11, City of Chicago	23.2	22.2	7.1	14.4	33.6	37.6	25.9	15.3	30.1	57.1
IL12, Western Suburbs	32.8	19.3	15.5	31.4	48.0	42.8	21.5	24.7	42.3	60.7
IL13, South & Southwest Suburbs	19.6	11.0	10.9	17.7	26.6	28.5	14.4	17.5	26.9	38.7

Table 2: Count of Philadelphia area students included in student list purchase that filtered on 2020 high school class and PSAT scores 1070 – 1180 (Not shown: American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN); and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (NHPI))

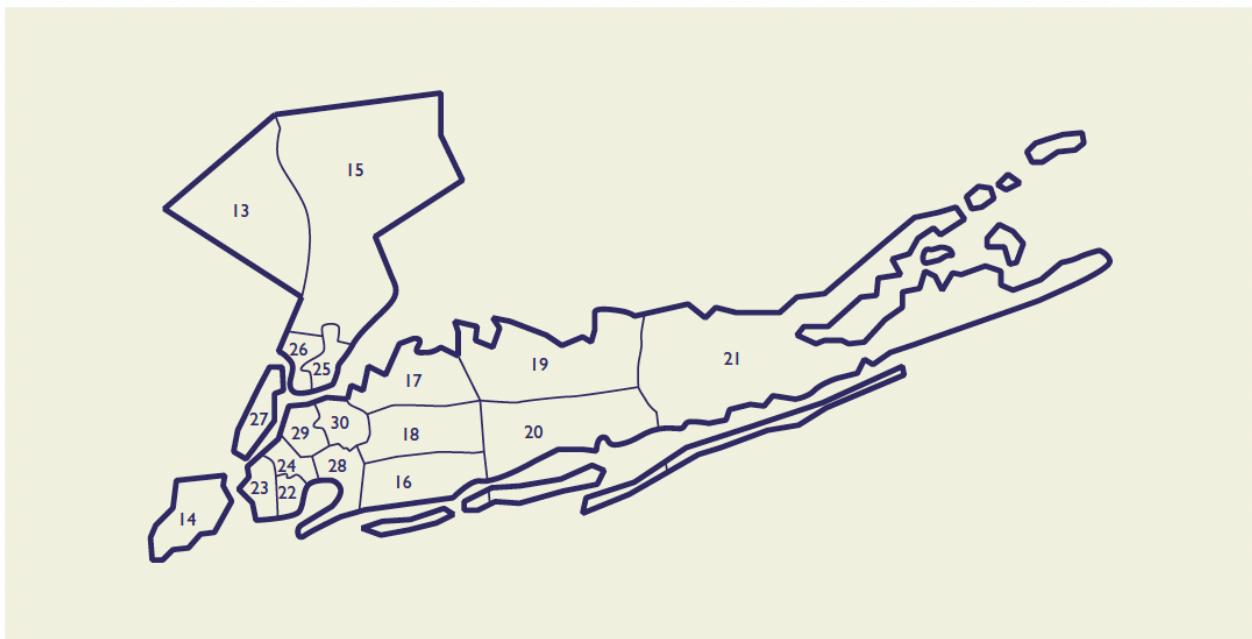
eps_codename	all	race_known	white	asian	black	hispanic	two_races
PA 1, Bucks Co	1,075	1,038	869	68	16	52	29
PA 2, Chester Co	1,104	1,027	826	57	28	71	40
PA 3, Delaware Co	715	665	529	40	38	26	25
PA 4, Montgomery Co	1,715	1,621	1,205	132	101	111	66
PA 5, Philadelphia Co	802	764	369	112	142	106	34

Table 3: Percent of total prospects purchased from each geomarket, Philadelphia area students included in student list purchase that filtered on 2020 high school class and PSAT scores 1070 – 1180 (Not shown: AI/AN, NHPI)

eps_codename	race_known	white	asian	black	hispanic	two_races
PA 1, Bucks Co	20.3	22.9	16.6	4.9	14.2	14.9
PA 2, Chester Co	20.1	21.7	13.9	8.6	19.4	20.6
PA 3, Delaware Co	13.0	13.9	9.8	11.7	7.1	12.9
PA 4, Montgomery Co	31.7	31.7	32.3	31.1	30.3	34.0
PA 5, Philadelphia Co	14.9	9.7	27.4	43.7	29.0	17.5

Table 4: Racial composition of purchased prospects from each Geomarket, Philadelphia area students included in student list purchase that filtered on 2020 high school class and PSAT scores 1070 – 1180 (Not shown: AI/AN, NHPI)

eps_codename	race_known	white	asian	black	hispanic	two_races
PA 1, Bucks Co	100	83.7	6.6	1.5	5.0	2.8
PA 2, Chester Co	100	80.4	5.6	2.7	6.9	3.9
PA 3, Delaware Co	100	79.5	6.0	5.7	3.9	3.8
PA 4, Montgomery Co	100	74.3	8.1	6.2	6.8	4.1
PA 5, Philadelphia Co	100	48.3	14.7	18.6	13.9	4.5



Geographic Market Name	EPS Code
New York (NY)	
13. Rockland County	NY13
14. Staten Island	NY14
15. Westchester County	NY15
16. Southern Nassau County	NY16
17. Northern Nassau County	NY17
18. Central Nassau County	NY18
19. Northwest Suffolk County	NY19
20. Southwest Suffolk County	NY20
21. East Suffolk County	NY21
22. Southeast Brooklyn	NY22
23. West Brooklyn	NY23
24. Northeast Brooklyn	NY24
25. East Bronx	NY25
26. West Bronx	NY26
27. Manhattan	NY27
28. South Queens	NY28
29. Northwest Queens	NY29
30. Northeast Queens	NY30

Major Metropolitan Area

Middle States Region

- 1. New York
 - Westchester and Rockland Counties: 13 and 15
 - Long Island: 16 through 21
 - City of New York: 14, 22 through 30

Figure 1: Geomarkets in New York City Area, NY state

FA20 - OOS PSAT AD (JAN19)

 Print

Created by: [REDACTED] last updated: 1/9/19

Order Number 448922

Order Summary

Order type:	Name License / Single Order	Name license status:	Fulfilled
Search owner:	[REDACTED]	Start date:	Wed, Jan 09, 2019
Search created:	1/7/19	End date:	Wed, Jan 09, 2019
Submitted by:	[REDACTED] Arizona State University PO Box 870112 Tempe , AZ 85281	Projected volume:	129,884 names
Submitted:	1/9/19	Maximum volume:	129,884 names
		Volume to date:	244,517 names
		Runs to date:	2 runs

Billing Details

Payment type:	Bill Me
Billing address:	[REDACTED] Arizona State University Office of Undergraduate Admis Tempe , AZ 85287

Delivery Options

File recipients:	[REDACTED]
Sorting sequence:	Alphabetic
Print format:	Upper and lowercase
File format:	Comma Delimited - .csv
Delivery frequency:	N/A

Search criteria

Criteria	Selections
Graduating Class	Assessment Search 2020 HS grad class New prospects Include only new students not included in my other orders
Geography	Geomarket WA - WA05 - Greater Washington (West) WA - WA04 - Greater Washington (East) WA - WA03 - Greater Spokane NJ - NJ08 - Essex & Southern Passaic Co WA - WA02 - South Sound NJ - NJ09 - Hudson Co WY - WY01 - Casper & Cheyenne WA - WA01 - Greater Seattle

<https://collegeboardsearch.collegeboard.org/pastudentsrch/report-file-summary.htm?savedSearchId=460519>

1/4

Figure 2: Partial order summary from a College Board student list purchase

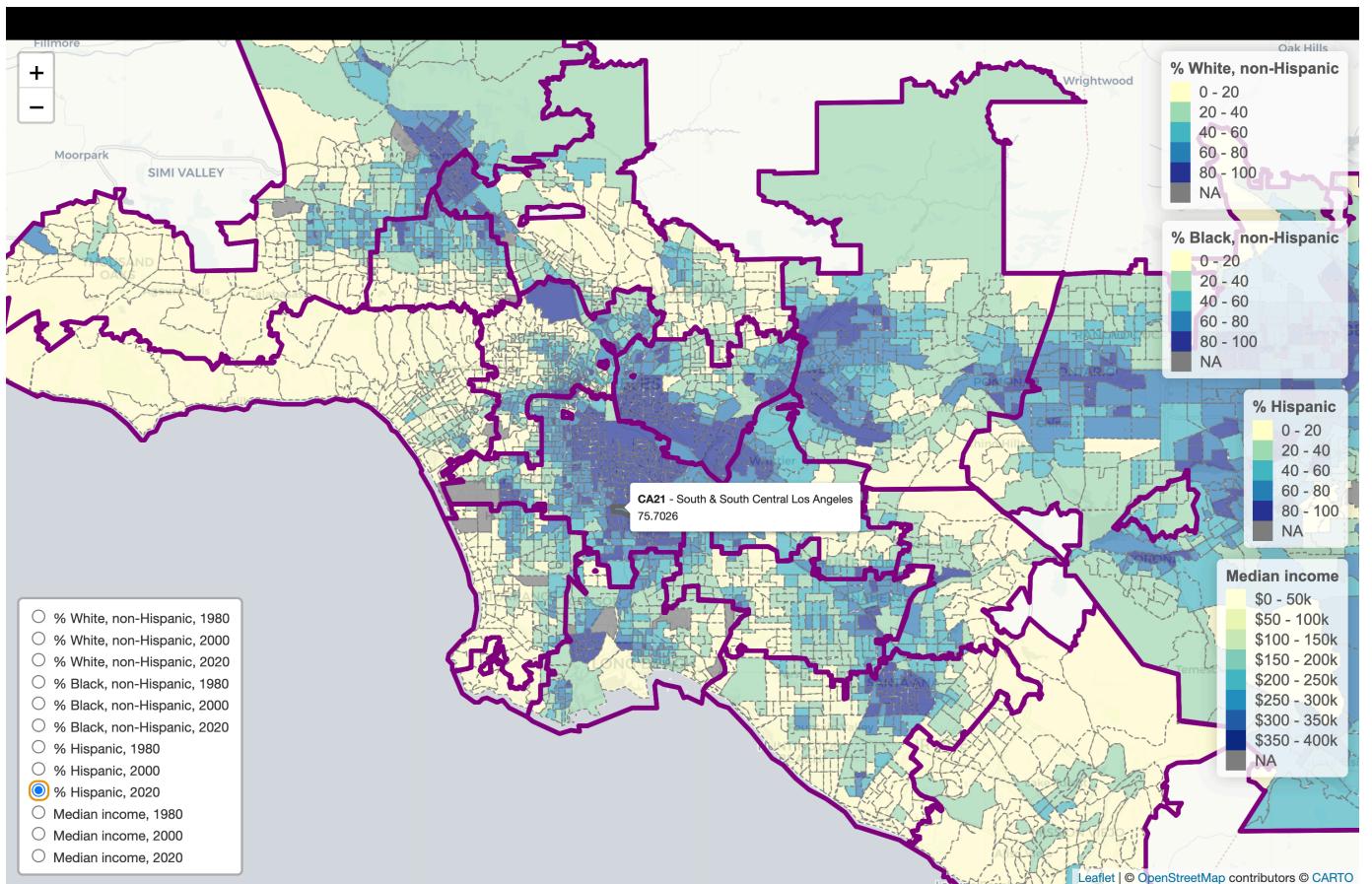


Figure 3: Screenshot of Los Angeles area Geomarkets, showing 2020 percent Hispanic by census tract

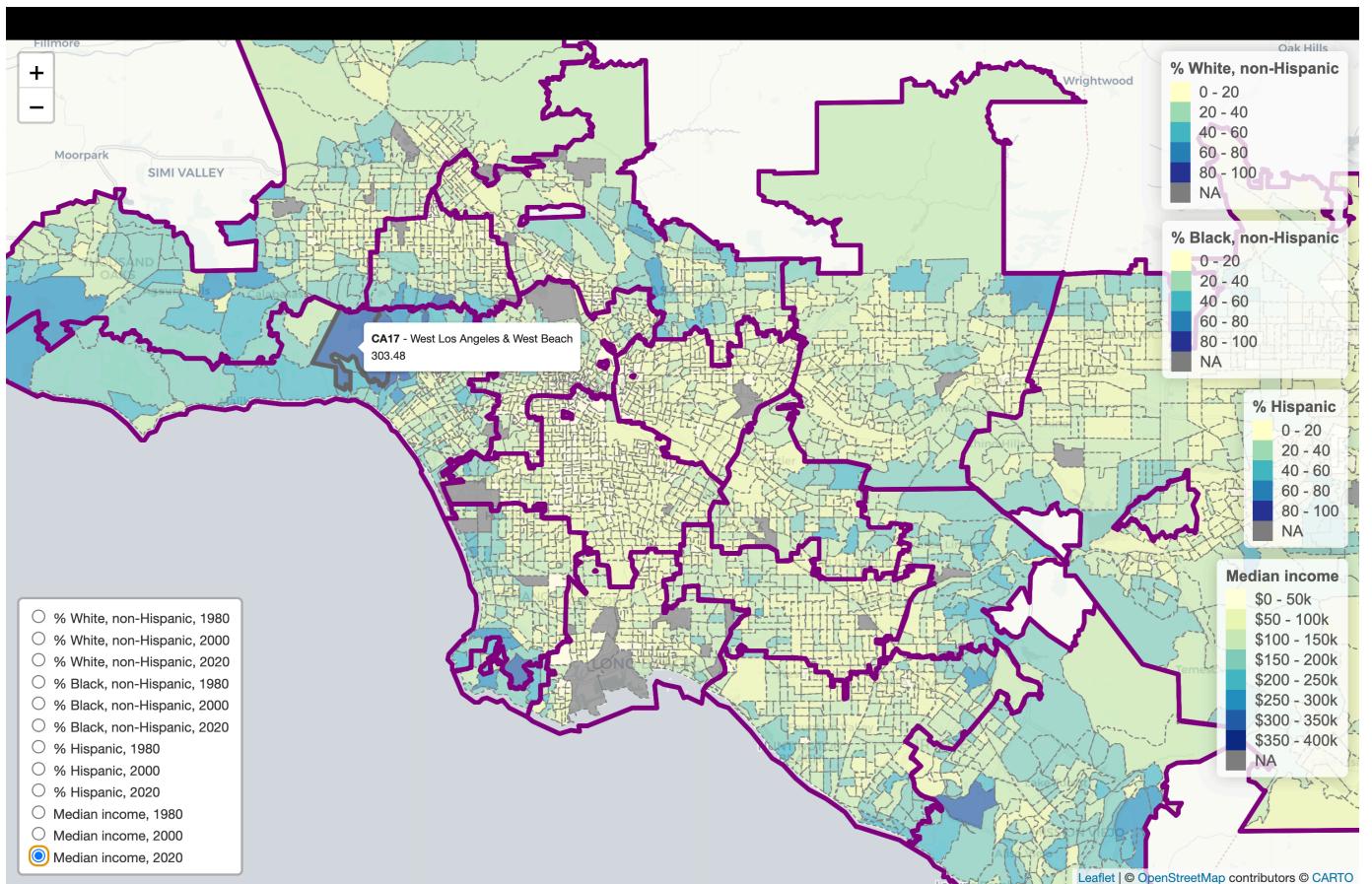


Figure 4: Screenshot of Los Angeles area Geomarkets, showing 2020 median household income by census tract

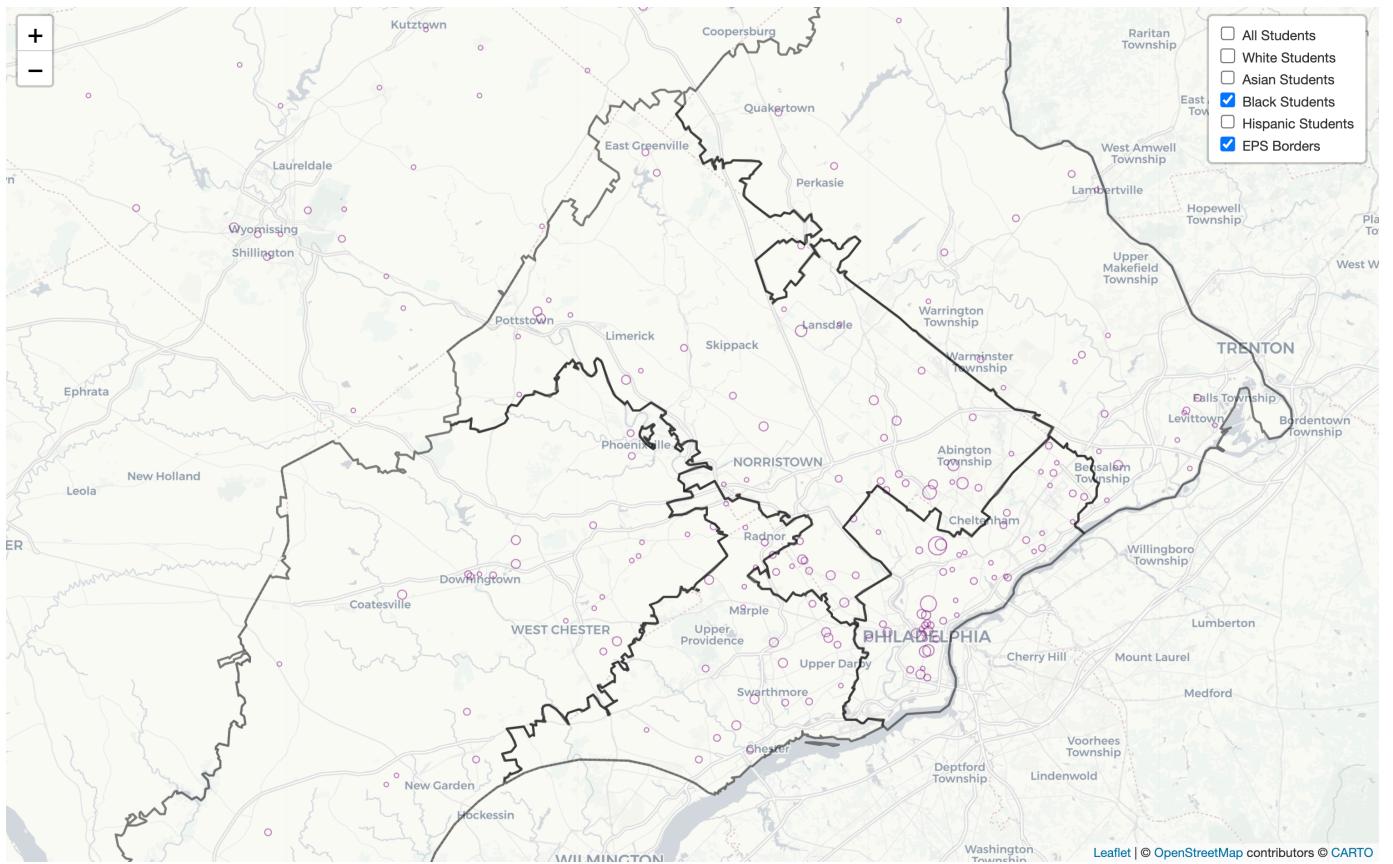


Figure 5: Screenshot of Philadelphia area Geomarkets, markers are high schools and marker size a function of number of Black student profiles purchased (2020 HS class, PSAT scores 1070 – 1180)