

## **Using Public Schools as the Community Center to Promote Private Well Education, Monitoring, and Research**

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Public outreach and education using the schools in rural communities has been a concept that dates back to WWI when the US government used schools as the center for information dissemination and public awareness (Hanifan, 1916, 1920). This presentation will share social science research results from the community based environmental monitoring research (CBEMR) project Groundwater Education Through Water Evaluation & Testing (GET WET!). The public school system was the center of citizen science private well research for two years in Orange County, New York. Local resource managers, colleges, engineering firms, laboratories, and GIS professionals donated their efforts to assist students 7-12 in testing and evaluating private well water in the classroom. Public schools were used as the community center point to connect citizens, local governments, community organizations, local businesses, and nearby colleges, in a joint effort to create social capital, increase trust within the once separate stakeholder groups, establish a baseline of groundwater chemistry, manage groundwater resources, and to educate the public to the need to test their private wells annually. This need for community research has increased as government funded programs, previously active in establishing baseline surveys of ecological health, have decreased (Carr, 2000). These parties then work on the dispersal of knowledge throughout the community in regard to land-use effects on water resources. This presentation will focus on sharing results based on participant interviews and surveys to assess outcomes from the GET WET! program. The collaboration formed in the CBEMR program GET WET! encouraged a platform for all stakeholders to work together to provide a sustainable means of policy enforcement or creation to safeguard drinking water. The results have implications for extension specialists and other who are interested in environmental attitudes and behavior related to private wells. We also include discussion on the interface between CBEMR and society.