

about Bettina Elias Siegel



Bettina Elias Siegel is a mom of two and a nationally recognized writer and advocate on issues relating to children and food policy.

A graduate of Yale College and Harvard Law School, Bettina practiced intellectual property, advertising, and food law in New York City for almost a decade before turning to a career in freelance writing. In early 2010, she became interested in improving the food in her children's school district, Houston ISD, and soon after launched *The Lunch Tray*, a blog about all things related to "kids and food, in school and out."

Bettina's writing on children and food has since appeared in many other outlets, including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and *Civil Eats*. She also appears frequently on national and local television and radio, including the *Today Show*, *The Doctors*, *ABC World News Tonight*, and *Anderson*, and she has been featured or quoted in a wide variety of publications, including the *New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Parents*, *Texas Monthly*, and *Politico*.

In 2015, *Family Circle* named Bettina one of the country's "20 Most Influential Moms."

Bettina has also spearheaded three victorious Change.org petition campaigns relating to school children and food, making her one of the most successful petitioners in the organization's history.

Bettina is the author and illustrator of *Mr. Zee's Apple Factory*, a free 12-minute rhyming video to teach young children about highly processed food, which has received close to 50,000 views and has become a valued resource for teachers' nutrition education curricula. She's also the author of the free 50-page e-book, *The Lunch Tray's Guide to Getting Junk Food Out of Your Child's Classroom*, which has been downloaded by thousands of parents and is now in its second edition.

Bettina lives in Houston with her husband and two children, and may be found on Twitter @thelunchtray.

author Q&A: KID FOOD

reprinted from the Oxford University Press blog



Bettina Elias Siegel never expected to become a children's food advocate. But when this former lawyer became a mom of two children, she began to see our society's food environment through a different and troubling lens.

Even as she struggled to feed her (sometimes "picky") kids healthfully at home, they seemed to be glutted with junk food in so many other aspects of their daily lives: highly processed school lunches, classroom candy rewards, PTA donut fundraisers, and morning soccer snacks consisting of fried chips and Gatorade.

So in 2010, Siegel launched *The Lunch Tray* blog, both to share these concerns with other parents and to discuss her own efforts to improve the school food in her children's district. In the intervening decade, *The Lunch Tray* has become a highly respected source of news and commentary about children and food policy, and Siegel has become nationally known as an outspoken advocate for improving our children's food environment, particularly on school campuses. Her forthcoming book, *Kid Food: The Challenge of Feeding Children in a Highly Processed World*, will be published by Oxford University Press on November 1st.

Q: You tend to be most associated with school food reform, but Kid Food has a broader scope. Can you give us a sense of the other topics you explore in the book?

A: I do tend to write a lot about school food on my blog, but only one chapter in *Kid Food* is devoted to school meals. That's because I wanted to take a more sweeping look at how we feed kids in America—in schools, in restaurants, in their daily activities, and even in our own homes. I also wanted to generally explore this artificial construct of "kid food" in our society—how did we get here, and how might we improve the unhealthy food that's now offered to our kids in so many contexts?

Q: How did your own experiences as a mother inform your writing of the book?

A: One thing I learned first-hand is that some children can be quite resistant to eating healthier food, and that came as a real shock for me as a parent. Both my husband and I are relatively healthy eaters, and I just never expected to have kids who might routinely spurn fruits and vegetables! So I especially wanted to drill down on that issue in *Kid Food*, as much to satisfy my own curiosity as the reader's: Where does that resistance to healthy foods come from? Is it innate or learned? What mistakes do parents make that might compound the problem? And how does children's perceived "pickiness" fuel the whole notion of "kid food?"

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Q: What's one piece of advice you'd offer parents who are trying to improve their child's food environment?

A: One of the chapters in *Kid Food* is devoted to showcasing effective parent advocates, and so many of them had the same advice. Whether it's asking your child's school to put an end to candy classroom rewards or trying to eliminate unhealthy snacks from your child's sports league, try not to go it alone. If you're the only one speaking up, it's unfortunately just too easy to be written off as "that parent." But if you have other parents by your side, or multiple names on a petition, or any other show of broader support, you'll instantly command more attention. And if you're attempting even more ambitious advocacy, such as improving your child's school meal program, you might even consider creating an official organization devoted to your cause.

Q: What was the most surprising thing you learned while researching and writing Kid Food?

A: When I started writing the book, one of the first things I wanted to research was the history of the restaurant children's menu. As any parent can attest, today's kids are typically offered the same sorts of foods—breaded, fried, and cheesy items—at almost every restaurant, regardless of whether it's a fast food chain or a more upscale, independent establishment. So I was curious to know when children's menus first appeared in American restaurants and whether the foods offered back then were as relatively unhealthy as the items we see today. It would be a bit of a spoiler to share here what I learned—but let's just say, my findings were quite unexpected!

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from Kid Food?

A: I wrote *Kid Food* with three goals in mind. First, I wanted to explain to readers exactly why our children's food environment is so unhealthy, looking at everything from the perverse incentives built into the National School Lunch Program to how the processed food industry both stokes and capitalizes on parents' worries about picky eating. I also take an unflinching look at how even well-meaning adults often exploit kids' love of junk food to achieve a variety of ends, such as covering school budget shortfalls, maintaining discipline, and even securing children's affection. Second, I wanted to empower parents to push back against these forces, so I offer readers 14 rules for effective face-to-face advocacy as well as advice on engaging in higher-level activism. But finally, I wanted readers to understand that there are limits to what we can do as individuals, so the book also discusses just a few fundamental shifts in national policy that could make a real difference for the health of America's kids.

advance praise for Kid Food



“With meticulous research and easy, conversational prose, Siegel makes an irrefutable case for changing the way we think about so-called ‘kid food’—and why we must transform the broken food system that feeds our children.”

—Alice Waters, owner of *Chez Panisse* and founder of *The Edible Schoolyard Project*

“Everybody who has children should read *Kid Food*. And everyone who doesn’t should read it, too. Siegel is thoughtful, practical, and fearless—a combination that should worry the food companies now threatening the health of all Americans.”

—Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*

“Siegel is a leader and a veteran in the movement to feed our kids well, and *Kid Food* is a primer on what we’ll need to do to get that done.”

—Mark Bittman, author of *How to Cook Everything*, and editor-in-chief of *Heated*

“Fascinating and enlightening. I will never look at a kid’s menu or baby food pouch the same way again—and I’m infinitely grateful for it.”

—Gail Simmons, food expert, *Top Chef* judge, and author of *Bringing It Home*

“Powerful, encouraging advocacy ... *Kid Food* equips parents with the wisdom and strategies they’ll need to raise—and feed—healthier kids.”

—Foreword Reviews

“An engaging must-read for anyone frustrated by the challenges of feeding children healthfully. Siegel does more than explain why ‘carnival food’ is now the everyday norm; she lays out the specific ways to approach food more positively at home—and in the larger community—to foster change.”

—Ellie Krieger, cookbook author and host of *Ellie’s Real Good Food*

“Gorgeously written, heartfelt, and deeply compelling ... Everyone who cares about kids must read Bettina Siegel’s fabulous *Kid Food*.”

—Marion Nestle, Professor, NYU, and author of *Soda Politics*

“*Kid Food* will help you see how the Food Giants have co-opted our eating habits, and how changing the way kids eat is our best shot at leveling the playing field.”

—Michael Moss, author of *Salt Sugar Fat*

“Fascinating and funny... and a must-read for anyone who cares about our children’s future.”

—Karen Le Billon, author of *French Kids Eat Everything*

“A fascinating look at the industry of children’s food and a practical guide for parents seeking to teach their children how to eat healthfully.”

—Library Journal

“Frustrated parents will find motivation and comfort in Siegel’s message”

—Publishers Weekly

Kid Food contact information



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