

The Politics of Food and Family: The Healthy Food Movement
Presented by The University of Houston Friends of Women's Studies
The Barbara Karkabi Living Archives Series
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Panel Biographies



Bettina Elias Siegel is a nationally recognized writer and commentator on matters relating to children and food policy. Her news articles and opinion pieces on those topics have appeared in a variety of publications including the *New York Times*, the *Houston Chronicle*, *Civil Eats* and her widely read blog, *The Lunch Tray*. She has also appeared on national and local television and radio, including the *Today Show*, *Anderson*, *The Doctors*, *ABC World News Tonight*, and *NBC Nightly News*.

In addition to her writing, Ms. Siegel has worked as an advocate within Houston ISD and at the national level to improve children's school food environments. Her advocacy work has included three Change.org petitions relating to school children and food, all which ended in victories. Bettina is currently writing a book, *Kid Food: Why Our Kids Are Deluged by Junk Food — and What We Can Do About It* (Oxford University Press 2019). She is a graduate of Yale College and Harvard Law

School and lives in Houston with her husband and two children. She can be found on Twitter at @thelunchtray.



Gwen Sims is the Director of Nutrition and Chronic Disease Prevention (NCDP), a division established in September 2014 at Harris County Public Health (HCPH) which serves Harris County, Texas – the third most populous county in the United States. The division currently employs almost 150 personnel. As NCDP Division Director, Ms. Sims oversees Nutrition and WIC Services (NWS) which includes 12 WIC Sites as well as high-risk nutrition counseling and breastfeeding services; the Chronic Disease Prevention Unit (CDPU) which includes Texas Healthy Community projects annually, Senior Health Outreach Services, Asthma Education projects and other chronic disease prevention work; and the Behavioral/Mental Health Unit (BMHU) which includes the Strategic Prevention Framework/Partnerships for Success project to address underage drinking and prescription drug misuse and abuse. In addition, Ms. Sims provides oversight and guidance for other departmental work including, but not limited to, Obesity Reduction and Tobacco Cessation community projects, as well as Health Education, specifically school health programs. She serves as the co-project

director for Healthy Living Matters (HLM), a collaborative dedicated to curbing childhood obesity through policy change. Ms. Sims is a registered and licensed dietitian who joined the health department in 1997. She is a graduate of Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with a Bachelor of Science in Human Nutrition and Foods and a Master's Degree in Education. Ms. Sims is a Louisiana native, married with two daughters and her hobbies are reading, baking (from which her staff benefits), and being a "soccer mom".



Betti Wiggins is one of the foremost authorities on school nutrition and food service management. The impact of her work has been felt throughout the country and she continues to work tirelessly to promote the need to provide students with nutritious food.

In May 2017, Ms. Wiggins was named officer of Nutrition Services for Houston Independent School District, the nation's seventh largest school district. She is responsible for managing and implementing all of the district's school nutrition programs that serve more than 280,000 nutritious meals to students at 287 schools every day, including free breakfast to all students, free lunch at 186 campuses, and dinner served at more than 50 sites. She is also responsible for the operations of the Food Services Support Facility, a state-of-the-art cooking, storage, and distribution center. The facility is the largest modern food production facility of its kind in an urban school district.

Prior to joining Houston ISD, Ms. Wiggins served as the executive director of the Office of School Nutrition for Detroit Public Schools Community District, where she was responsible for school-based meal operations in 141 schools. Under her leadership, the Detroit School Garden Collaborative was established in 2011. Since its inception, the program has grown to support more than 80 school-based gardens and a two-acre school farm.

Ms. Wiggins is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including being named one of *EatingWell's* American Food Heroes, the International Foodservices Manufacturers Association's (IFMA) 2017 Silver Plate award, the School Nutrition Foundation's 2017 School Nutrition Hero award, and *FoodService Director Magazine's* 2017 Food Service Director of the Year. She currently serves as vice chair of the Local Food Association and sits on the executive committee of the National Farm to School Network. She has delivered special testimony on the subject of "Meeting the Challenges of Feeding America's School Children" at a congressional hearing before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry of the United States Senate. Ms. Wiggins earned a bachelor's degree in nutrition from Wayne State University and pursued graduate studies at the University of Minnesota. She holds a certificate in municipal management from George Washington University.

Moderator:



Dr. Daphne Hernandez is an Assistant Professor of Nutrition, Obesity Studies, and Health Disparities at the University of Houston. She has extensive experience studying gender and race/ethnic health disparities resulting from poverty-related issues, including food insecurity and obesity across the lifespan. The impact of this work has resulted in funding from the National Cancer Institute, USDA, William T. Grant Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Her work has also been nationally recognized by the media (*Time* magazine) and professional organizations, including the National Council on Family Relations. Due to her significant contributions in the areas of health disparities, food insecurity, and obesity research and budding national scholar reputation, the University of Houston's Women and Gender Resource Center awarded her the "2016 Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award". Dr. Hernandez received her bachelors in psychology from Princeton University where she was a Division I diver. She then went on to earn her Masters of Science in Education from the University of Pennsylvania, where she also served as the diving coach for the women's and men's teams. Her doctorate in developmental psychology was awarded from Boston College. She received postdoctoral training in public policy and poverty from the University of Michigan.