

CONCLUSION

Jennifer E. Gaddis and Sarah A. Robert

School food politics is everywhere. Beyond the legislative chamber where policy is crafted or the corporate food lobbyist's portfolio, a whole ecosystem of policy protagonism (or policy protagonists) is flourishing. Small-holder farmers are forming cooperatives and securing government contracts that allow them to nourish young people with food that is healthy, safe, and sustainably produced. Young people—from Argentina to Sweden and beyond—are protesting and organizing together for school food justice.¹ School food workers in South Korea and Ghana are striking to demand higher pay and greater respect for their essential labor.² And parents are fighting their local school boards to ensure students are given enough time to eat their meals and culturally relevant food.³ This is just a small sampling of what we see happening, and we know from talking with and learning from others that possibilities abound.

Feeding students during the school day involves the work of many different stakeholder groups. Yet only a select few (mostly policy elites) see themselves as doing “political” work and subsequently claim power in the policymaking process. In the preceding chapters, however, we learn from and about a multitude of stakeholders (mostly *not* policy elites) who are intervening with the state in the way Silvia Federici encourages in the foreword to this collection. These policy protagonists are making sense

of and doing political work within and across local, national, and global levels to transform school food systems.

PUSHING THE FIELD OF SCHOOL FOOD POLITICS FORWARD

Our desire to raise awareness of the political economic systems influencing who feeds whom, what, how, when, and for what purpose builds on the foundation laid over a decade ago by *School Food Politics*, which included essays from scholars and practitioners from all six continents.⁴ In preparing this volume, we took the same inclusive approach to authorship while charting a pathway toward a feminist politics of food and education. We found ourselves asking big questions: How can school food programs and policies play a transformative role in the food movement? What makes school food a positive experience for students, parents, and education and food chain workers? How might we reimagine school meals and the spaces where they are prepared and served in ways that support community well-being? What policy mechanisms and organizing strategies are necessary to achieve these goals? How might students, teachers, food service workers, and other members of the school community be supported as leaders in this movement? How might different theoretical frameworks and/or theories of change enhance, enliven, and advance our understanding of school food politics? How might we reframe school food as an anti-capitalist, feminist, ecological concern and, in doing so, open new pathways for organizing?

So, in June 2020, we issued a call for a new book: *Transforming School Food Politics around the World*. We received forty-five abstracts and selected those that best connected to the themes of the volume: systems change, policy protagonism, and the feminist politics of food and education. We rejected those that had a narrow focus on nutrition, public health, or development. We also rejected those with an extremely top-down approach that lacked the voices of grassroots policy protagonists. We prioritized chapters that uplifted real-life examples of transformative school food politics and submissions from the Global South. Unfortunately, as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed and posed tremendous and unequal challenges, several authors were no longer able to complete their chapters. This included authors from Aotearoa New Zealand (Māori authors), Australia, Botswana,

Ghana, Philippines, and Sweden. The final composition of this collection reflects not only these changes to authorship but also our own positionality as academics based at institutions in the US with strong connections to practitioners and organizations in the US and Canada.

STRATEGIES AND PRIORITIES FOR EXPANDING THE FIELD

What we and our collaborators have offered through this book is a set of tools for analyzing school food systems and a collection of empirical examples that showcase the creativity and dedication of people and communities who affirm the transformative potential for broadscale policy protagonism and engagement with the state. Many authors began their chapters with a brief explanation of the social organization of their national school meal program—the early history, evolving goals, funding, and local implementation—with a particular emphasis on the stakeholders involved in shaping who feeds whom, what, how, and for what purpose. In doing so, they demonstrate how historical and place-specific context shapes both the problems with school food systems and the possibilities for transformation. We see this as fundamental to both the academic discussion of school food politics and enriching for policy protagonists whose efforts may benefit from a stronger historical understanding of the school food system they seek to transform.

We have learned from chapter contributors and through our own research on school food politics that we must be creative and collaborative to build this knowledge base. For example, in chapter 1, Alexis Agliano Sanborn, the US-based award-winning filmmaker of the documentary short *Nourishing Japan*, leveraged her background in Japanese Studies and familiarity with the Japanese school lunch system to coauthor a chapter with Professor Katsura Omori, a leading Japanese academic whose research and teaching focuses on food education, local food, and traditional cuisines in school meals. Their combined backgrounds made for a powerful writing team that was able to highlight the rich contextual specificities of Japan's school meals that would be of most widespread interest to an international audience. In chapter 5, Raven Lewis, a high school student from the US, partnered with her mentor, Jarrett Stein. His experience with academic writing and long-standing relationship with Rebel Ventures

enhanced Raven's first-hand account and resulted in a more robust story of the organization and its impact.

It is our strong belief that community perspectives are an important form of knowledge, and we encourage practitioners to share their policy protagonism more widely. In chapters 14 and 15, leaders of two state-level campaigns for universal free school meals in the US tell their own organizational histories. They do the valuable work of identifying the multiple stakeholders and levels of governance that impact their school food systems, articulating their organizations' goals and strategies for change, and reflecting on lessons learned. Combined authorship from academic and community partners offers another approach to building collective knowledge of school food politics and systems change, as we see in chapters 2, 6, 7, and 12.

We also want to uplift the potential for community research to advance a feminist politics of food and education. In chapter 8, Prerna Rana, uses her training as a PhD student in civil society and community research to direct our attention to grassroots struggles and community-level experiences that center students' right to food and the role of women in feeding them a midday meal. Likewise, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (chapter 13) provides an example of how organizations can engage in creative, community-based participatory research to elevate the experiences and knowledge of teachers and other overlooked stakeholder groups.

People in the Global North have much to learn from the Global South (see chapters 3, 8, 9, and 10 in this collection) about school food politics. We urge scholars and activists to seek out opportunities to learn from those who are doing this work. The United Nations' report *The State of School Feeding Worldwide* offers a useful starting point.⁵ It is published every two years and includes inspirational examples of school food organization and innovation from a wide range of global contexts. Moreover, we see tremendous value in transnational dialogue and cross-country comparisons, and the ability to learn from a rich diversity of places and scholars is growing through these coordinated efforts. Yet many academic studies and primary source materials (e.g., newspapers and government documents) that shed light on school food politics may go overlooked due to language barriers. Chapters 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 11 in this book do the important work of translating data from Japanese, Spanish, Finnish, Hindi, Portuguese, and Korean for an English-language audience. Additional collaborative scholarship and

translation of primary source materials into multiple languages (not just English) would further the field of school food politics and bolster transformative efforts worldwide.

Knowledge of school food politics comes in many forms. We wish to underscore the importance of embodied knowledge and lived experience, which many of our authors access through different techniques such as autoethnography (chapter 5), oral histories (chapter 10), and composite narratives (chapter 12). Organizational records and other texts, too, are vital sources of information that require communal efforts to create and maintain. To this end, we encourage individual policy protagonists, organizations, and coalitions to document, archive, and make available the artifacts that represent their work.

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL FOOD POLITICS THROUGH CARE AND COMMUNITY

Our goal in this book was to highlight instances of transformative school food politics, which we believe is not possible without policy protagonism, itself an act of care that can be used to produce more caring food and education systems. When we care about school meals, we must care for and about not only the children who eat them but also the cooks and cafeteria workers, teachers, agricultural workers, and others whose labor they depend on. And through our school food systems, we must care for the natural environment on which all life depends. This core belief is threaded through the many chapters of this book and their multifaceted engagements with the concept of sustainability, which is foundational for enacting a feminist politics of food and education that centers care.

Care is a powerful form of acting in community—even at the national level—with implications for how we feed children in school. The feminist transformation we seek is one that comes from a diversity of stakeholders contributing their situated knowledge, questioning who holds power and who claims power, and forming collaborations to increase policy protagonism. We hope readers will have gained a deeper appreciation of school meals as central to the infrastructure of daily life that sustains and nourishes communities currently and into the future. We further hope that readers will recognize care as a form of power with the potential to bring

about transformative change when people act in community with one another to renegotiate who feeds whom, what, how, and for what purpose.

NOTES

1. See the introduction to this volume for more on the Argentine student protest. Students at the Globala School in Stockholm, who have eaten meat-free school lunches since 2008, organized together to democratically design a program that reflected their values and concerns. Magnus Naess, personal communication with the authors, February 9, 2021. The Milwaukee school lunch justice campaign is another example. See Marriam Mackar, "Fresh over Frozen: MPS Students Fight for Better School Lunches at School Board Meeting," *TMJ4 Milwaukee*, January 12, 2023, <https://www.tmj4.com/news/local-news/fresh-over-frozen-mps-students-fight-for-better-school-lunches-at-school-board-meeting>; Isaiah Holmes, "Student Activists Demand Lunch Justice in Milwaukee Schools," *Wisconsin Examiner*, April 2, 2022, <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2022/04/02/student-activists-demand-lunch-justice-in-milwaukee-schools/>.
2. For more on the South Korean strike, see Kim Na-yeon, "Non-Regular School Cafeteria and Care Workers Go on Strike Today," *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 31, 2023, http://english.khan.co.kr/khan_art_view.html?artid=202303311712097&code=710100. For more on the national school caterer strike in Ghana, see *JoyNews*, "School Feeding: Some Basic School Pupils Bemoan Poor Quality of Food amid Strike by Caterers," April 28, 2023, video, 8:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=-jSNwN8Ld98>.
3. For an example of parents fighting for longer lunch periods, see Amy Bounds, "BVSD Parents Advocate for Longer Elementary Lunches," *Boulder Daily Camera*, December 31, 2022, <https://www.dailycamera.com/2022/12/31/bvsvd-parents-advocate-for-longer-elementary-lunches>. For an example of parent advocates advocating for culturally relevant meals, see Kaylee Domzalski, "Inside Latino Parents' Push for Healthy, Culturally Appropriate School Lunches," *Education Week*, April 29, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/inside-latino-parents-push-for-healthy-culturally-appropriate-school-lunches/2022/04>.
4. See Sarah A. Robert and Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower, *School Food Politics: The Complex Ecology of Hunger and Feeding in Schools around the World* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).
5. See World Food Programme, *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022* (Rome: World Food Programme, 2022), <https://www.wfp.org/publications/state-school-feeding-worldwide-2022>.

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