

## LAC 2026 Recap

By Kelly Diaz, RD, LDN, SNS

On March 7, the Illinois School Nutrition Association (ILSNA) Legislative Committee (Maribel Alchin, Kelly Diaz, Rachelle Wuellner, Drio Turcios, and Katie Weir) descended on Washington D.C. to attend the 2026 SNA Legislative Action Conference (LAC). We were also joined by Stacey Whitney, Culinary Director for the Academy for Global Citizenship and industry partners Cheryl Pratt (ES Foods), Dana Saverino (SA Piazza), Rebecca Nakamura (Kellanova), David Grotto (Kellanova), and Sara Jankowski (AmTab). Drio was awarded a spot at the Executive Leadership Program held at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business prior to the conference kicking off. Maribel attended the pre-conference session *Demystifying School Nutrition Laws and Regulations: From Basics to Bold Changes*.

New this year, SNA LAC put out a call for education session proposals. To the committee's delight, our session, which was previously presented at the 2025 ILSNA Annual Conference, was accepted! Maribel, Katie and Shelly mustered up the courage to speak to an early-morning group of roughly 200 attendees on Sunday about Conquering the Hill with Confidence: Legislators and Advocacy. They did a fabulous job! And with that under their belts, we were in for a treat of engaging speakers and panelists the next two days.

Themes emerged from the recently released [Dietary Guidelines for Americans \(2025-2030\)](#) (DGA) as presented by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). A focus on eating real foods and limiting Ultra Processed Foods (UPFs) permeated the conversation. The need to define UPFs became a clear concern of the conference with many states already passing bills banning specific ingredients and processes. Food manufacturers voiced their concern over the realities of their industry needing clarification of UPFs, realistic timelines, and, of course, the sheer cost that reformulation creates for their portfolios. Some are wondering if they can still compete in the K-12 segment.

But clearly heard by all, was the ask to "comment." With the DGAs published, the next step in the rule-making process is the release of the proposed rules followed by a 60-day public comment period. **We ask that you please be on the lookout for communications around the proposed rules AND provide comments.** Each unique comment legally must be read, and this is our opportunity to convey the feasibility of the rules that we will be held to. After that, the final rules are expected in December 2026.

Armed with the [SNA position paper](#), [talking points](#), an [infographic](#), and a [photobook](#) we created highlighting school districts in IL, we teamed up with our industry partners and hit the Hill Tuesday morning (read that SNA resource if you don't already - Tuesday Morning). By the close of the day, we had met with staffers from 16 out of 17 [Illinois congressional districts](#) and both Senators! Conversations were lively and energizing. We asked for their support to invest in school meals, protect and expand access, and ensure updates to our programs are feasible. **If any of this is sounding interesting, now is the time to work into your district budget the cost to attend LAC 2027. Join us!**

Fired up that school nutrition is in the mainstream conversation today; we are bringing these same messages home to Illinois to champion better nutrition and stronger school meal programs for healthier children. On Thursday, April 15 we are planning a state advocacy day to speak with our state representatives. **If you have an interest in protecting the stability and dignity that school meals provide to children, please join us to have your voice heard.**



From left to right: Katie Weir, Drio Turcios, Kelly Diaz, Rachelle Wuellner, Dana Saverino, Maribel Alchin, Stacey Whitney



From left to right: Katie Weir, Rachelle Wuellner, Maribel Alchin









