Allegheny-Clarion Valley School District

Eating Disorder Awareness & Education

Information for Students and Families

Pennsylvania School Code Requirement

Section 1426 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code requires school entities to make eating-disorder awareness and education information available annually for students in grades 6–12 through the district's publicly accessible website. The law directs the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Pennsylvania Department of Education to develop and disseminate materials addressing prevention, warning signs, risk factors, and resources. This District notice supports that requirement and will be supplemented by any state-developed materials disseminated under Section 1426.

Purpose. Eating disorders are serious health conditions that can affect a student's physical health, emotional well-being, relationships, concentration, attendance, and learning. Early recognition and treatment improve the chance of recovery. This information is intended to help students and families recognize concerns and know where to seek support.

Important

Eating disorders are not a choice, and they cannot be identified by appearance alone. A person of any body size, age, sex, race, ethnicity, or background can have an eating disorder. If you are concerned

about yourself or someone else, ask for help - even if you are unsure whether the signs or behaviors indicate an eating disorder.

What Is an Eating Disorder?

Eating disorders are serious illnesses involving persistent disturbances in eating behaviors and related thoughts or emotions. They may involve restriction of food, loss-of-control eating, compensatory behaviors, intense distress about food or body image, or avoidance of foods for reasons unrelated to weight or shape. Eating disorders can become medically dangerous and may occur alongside anxiety, depression, substance-use concerns, or suicidal thoughts.

Common Types

- **Anorexia nervosa:** severe restriction of food intake, often accompanied by intense fear of weight gain or a distorted body image.
- **Bulimia nervosa:** recurrent episodes of loss-of-control eating followed by behaviors intended to compensate for eating, such as vomiting, fasting, misuse of laxatives or other medications, or excessive exercise.
- **Binge-eating disorder:** recurrent episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food with a sense of loss of control and significant distress, without regular compensatory behaviors.
- **Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID):** restriction in the amount or variety of food because of low interest in eating, sensory sensitivity, or fear of consequences such as choking or vomiting; it is not driven by body-image concerns.
- **Other specified feeding or eating disorders:** clinically significant eating-related symptoms that cause distress or impairment even when all criteria for one of the disorders above are not met.

Warning Signs: When to Pay Attention

One sign by itself does not prove that a person has an eating disorder. A pattern of changes—or a concern that is becoming more intense, secretive, or disruptive—should be taken seriously. Warning signs may include:

Behavioral / Emotional Signs	Physical / School-Related Signs
• Skipping meals, avoiding eating with others, or developing increasingly rigid food rules • Strong preoccupation with food, weight, shape, calories, “clean” eating, or body checking • Frequent dieting, fasting, secretive eating, or episodes of feeling out of control while eating • Vomiting, misuse of laxatives/medications, or exercising excessively to compensate for eating • Marked distress, guilt, or shame related to eating or body image • Increasingly narrow food choices, fear of choking/vomiting, or worsening sensory-based food avoidance • Withdrawal from friends, family meals, activities, or social events involving food	• Significant or rapid weight change, poor growth, or changes in normal growth patterns (body size alone is not diagnostic) • Dizziness, fainting, weakness, fatigue, feeling unusually cold, or difficulty concentrating • Frequent stomach complaints, constipation, reflux, or other unexplained gastrointestinal concerns • Changes in sleep, mood, irritability, anxiety, or depression • Dental or throat problems that may accompany repeated vomiting • Declining attendance, school performance, participation, or ability to focus

Risk Factors

Eating disorders do not have a single cause. Research indicates that genetic, biological, psychological, behavioral, and social factors can contribute to risk. Factors that may increase vulnerability include:

- A personal or family history of eating disorders or other mental health conditions
- Anxiety, depression, perfectionism, obsessive traits, or difficulty coping with stress
- Body dissatisfaction, repeated dieting or restrictive eating, or strong pressure to change body size
- Bullying, teasing, weight stigma, discrimination, trauma, or major life transitions
- Social or media pressures that promote unrealistic appearance standards
- Participation in activities where weight, appearance, or body composition is strongly emphasized

Remember

Risk factors are not destiny. A student may develop an eating disorder without obvious risk factors, and a student with several risk factors may never develop one. Concerns should be based on the whole person and changes in behavior, health, or functioning—not on appearance.

If You Are a Student and You Are Worried

1. Tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. You can start with a parent/guardian, school counselor, school nurse, school psychologist, administrator, teacher, coach, or another adult you trust.
2. Ask for help even if you are not sure what is happening. You do not need a diagnosis before speaking up.
3. If you are worried about a friend, do not promise to keep it secret. Share the concern with a trusted adult who can help connect your friend to support.
4. Avoid commenting on another person's weight, body, or food choices. Focus instead on what you have noticed and why you care—for example, changes in energy, mood, eating, exercise, or participation.
5. If you feel unsafe, are thinking about suicide or self-harm, or believe the situation is an emergency, use the crisis resources listed below immediately.

How Families Can Help

- Take concerns seriously and respond calmly. Eating disorders are illnesses, not attention-seeking, defiance, or a lack of willpower.
- Focus the conversation on health, emotions, behaviors, and changes you have noticed rather than weight, shape, or appearance.
- Contact your child's pediatrician or primary care provider for a medical evaluation and ask whether an eating-disorder specialist is appropriate.
- Seek qualified mental health and nutrition professionals with specific training in eating disorders when recommended.
- Partner with the school when symptoms affect attendance, concentration, meals at school, physical activity, or participation in classes and activities.
- Continue to offer support. Recovery is possible, and family involvement can be an important part of treatment for adolescents.

School-Based Support at A-C Valley School District

Students and families may contact school personnel for help connecting to appropriate supports. Depending on the concern, the school may assist with communication, health monitoring within the school nurse's scope, counseling supports, academic or attendance planning, and coordination with outside providers as permitted by law and parent/guardian authorization.

- School Counselor
- School Nurse
- School Psychologist
- Building Principal or Assistant Principal

- Trusted Teacher, Coach, or Other Staff Member

How to start: Tell any trusted school adult, “I am worried about my eating, exercise, body image, or health,” or “I am worried about a friend and need help.” The adult can help connect you with the appropriate school support person.

Resources for Students and Families

Resource	How It Can Help	Contact
National Alliance for Eating Disorders	Free helpline staffed by licensed therapists specializing in eating disorders; support and referrals to treatment resources.	1-866-662-1235 Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m. ET allianceforeatingdisorders.com
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline	Free, confidential crisis support for emotional distress, suicidal thoughts, or a mental health crisis.	Call or text 988 Chat: 988lifeline.org
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)	Reliable information about eating disorders, symptoms, treatment, and finding help.	nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/eating-disorders
SAMHSA FindTreatment.gov	Search for mental health and substance-use treatment services.	FindTreatment.gov

Emergency Help

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for a medical emergency—for example, if a person collapses, has chest pain, has severe confusion, cannot stay awake, has trouble breathing, or appears dangerously ill. If a student is experiencing suicidal thoughts, self-harm risk, or an emotional crisis, call or text 988.

A Note About Recovery

Eating disorders are treatable. Recovery can take time and may require a team that includes medical, mental health, and nutrition professionals. Reaching out early is a sign of strength and can prevent symptoms from becoming more severe. Students should not have to manage these concerns alone.

Legal Basis and Sources

- Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949, Section 1426, Eating Disorder Awareness and Education, as added by Act 20 of 2026 (Act of July 12, 2026, P.L. 220, No. 20). https://www.palegis.us/statutes/unconsolidated/law-information/view-statute?ActNum=0020.&SessInd=0&SessYr=2026&txtType=PDF
- Pennsylvania Department of Education, School Code PK–12 Implementation Guide (Section 1426). https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/schools/school-services/school-code-implementation-guide
- National Institute of Mental Health, “Eating Disorders: What You Need to Know.” https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/eating-disorders

- National Alliance for Eating Disorders, Helpline and treatment-referral information. https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com/
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. https://988lifeline.org/

Educational notice: This information is provided for educational purposes and is not a diagnosis or a substitute for evaluation by a qualified health care professional. The District will update this notice as Pennsylvania agencies release or revise materials under Section 1426.