

February Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the February 2024 issue of *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champions, members of an elementary school wellness team who bonded, increased their activity, and won grant money in last fall's physical activity challenge;
- a webinar on simple habits and everyday practices to keep your heart healthy;
- your medical plan's online health and wellness tools and resources;
- how the Wellness Initiatives program can save you money;
- *Heart Health Month* from Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program;
- another *Virtual Staff Wellness Day*; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—Heart Health: Keep It Strong All Life Long

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Someone in this country dies of heart disease every 38 seconds. Join us to learn simple habits and everyday practices that can keep our hearts healthy all life long. By taking a look at the medical side of heart health, we will find out what to do to prevent heart disease.

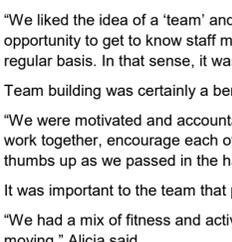
Thursday, February 22, 2024
4:30 p.m.—5:30 p.m.

Please **email Well Aware** to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a link to the webinar in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

Spread the word with our **printable flyer**. Visit the **Wellness Webinar Library**.

Wellness Champions Build Camaraderie and Win Grant Money after Challenging Themselves to Go at Their Own Pace

Mrs. Alicia O. Finley, special education teacher, and other wellness team members, Damascus Elementary School



Back row, l to r: Jennie Pogorzala, Emily Capellan, Jack McCaffrey, Cheyanne Gregory, Alicia Finley, Deanna (Lundy) Strausbaugh
Front row, l to r: Delyza Howard, Jenn Wilson, Alex Eshelman, Michela Harrigan, Melanie Miller

Mrs. Alicia O. Finley, special education teacher, and the wellness team from Damascus Elementary School decided to give the Well Aware fall physical activity challenge a try. Team members bonded, increased their activity, and won grant money for their efforts. Their participation led to a lot of positive outcomes, and they are encouraging other schools to get involved in the next Well Aware challenge.

There were many reasons why the staff at Damascus Elementary School decided to join the *MCPS on the Move* challenge last fall. Many saw it as an opportunity to resume their fitness activities after summer break, others saw it as a way to get started on a fitness journey. Some hoped to lose weight, and others hoped to maintain their weight after losing pounds over the summer. For everyone that participated, it was a way to boost staff morale, and keep up their motivation to continue exercising.

"Being active helps us feel better physically, which also helps us mentally," Alicia said. "Both of these help us handle, on an emotional level, what we need to face day-to-day or during a busy week. Feeling good physically, mentally, and emotionally helps us to do our jobs well or even better. All three work together."

Supporting each other as part of a team helped participants build camaraderie during the challenge.

"We liked the idea of a 'team' and felt unified and connected," Alicia said. "It was an opportunity to get to know staff members we may not have otherwise worked with on regular basis. In that sense, it was a wonderful way to build friendships."

Team building was certainly a benefit to participating school staff.

"We were motivated and accountable to our team," Alicia said. "It gave us an opportunity to work together, encourage each other, and cheer for each other. Even just a quick nod or a thumbs up as we passed in the hallway was uplifting."

It was important to the team that participants could set their own pace.

"We had a mix of fitness and activity levels, which did not matter as long as we kept moving," Alicia said.

The Damascus Elementary School team is looking forward to the next challenge. In the meantime, some members are participating in a cluster volleyball team.

The team has great advice for those thinking of creating a team for the next challenge.

"One of our team members said we should 'Just do it,'" Alicia said. "This meant we should get a group together and move—at any pace, on our own schedules. Our team never worked out together as one. We worked out on our own schedules but discussed our workouts with each other. It is not hard to organize a team; you just need interested people."

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

Monthly Connection: Heart Health Month



Did you know that mental and physical health are linked? Recent research has shown that an improvement or decline in one can lead to an improvement or decline in the other. The great news is that the body and brain are both very responsive to positive change.

For this reason, the MCPS Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Well Aware are working together to bring you monthly topics focusing on mental and physical health. Our joint resources will help you align your wellness journey to ensure you are focusing on both physical and mental health. Look for these resources each month in the *Well Aware eNews*, *The Bulletin*, the *Well Aware Toolbox* and on the *EAP web page*.

EAP Resources

February is Heart Health Month and a great time to talk about stress. Although stress is a part of life, too much stress without periods of relief, relaxation, or support takes a toll on the mind and body. Prolonged periods of chronic stress can increase the risk of developing several health conditions, including anxiety, depression, heart disease, and stroke.

Consider taking time this month to honestly reflect on your stress level and stress management approach to determine what's working well and what needs to change. If you are struggling to manage the stressors in your life, remember the EAP is here to help with confidential, no-cost, short-term counseling, workshops, and mental health and wellness resources.

Mindfulness practices have been linked to stress reduction. Join the EAP for a workshop on **Mindfulness: How to Be More Present—Part 1** on February 22, 2024, from 5:00–6:00 p.m. This workshop is open to all MCPS employees. Register on **Professional Development Online (PDO)**—course #91839.

Check out the resources below for tips to manage stress and support heart health:

- **Stress Less For a Healthy Heart Fact Sheet** from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
- **Fight Stress infographic** from the American Heart Association (AHA)
- **Stop Stress in its Tracks** from the AHA
- **Chronic stress puts your health at risk** from the Mayo Clinic

Well Aware Resources

During American Heart Month, the AHA and other organizations reinforce the importance of heart health, and the need for more research and effort to ensure that millions of people live longer and healthier.

In most cases, heart disease is preventable when people adopt a healthy lifestyle, which includes not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, controlling blood sugar and cholesterol, treating high blood pressure, getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week and getting regular checkups.

- **Read "Heart Attack, Stroke and Cardiac Arrest Symptoms"**
- **Learn more about living a healthy lifestyle**
- **Learn more about healthy eating**
- **Learn how fitness positively impacts your heart**

Today Is the American Heart Association's National Wear Red Day

The American Heart Association (AHA) is holding its yearly National Wear Red Day on Friday, February 2, 2024, to call attention to heart disease. Why "Go Red?" According to AHA, "Heart disease and stroke cause one in three deaths among women each year, killing approximately one woman every 80 seconds. Fortunately, we have the power to change that because 80 percent of cardiac and stroke events may be prevented with education and action.

Well Aware encourages all Montgomery County Public Schools employees to make their heart health a priority. Schedule your annual preventive check-up to review your overall health, measure your blood pressure, check your cholesterol, and look for signs of heart disease, stroke, and other illnesses.

Do your part to educate yourself, your friends, and your family this year. Join the movement to end heart disease and strokes in women because it's not just a man's disease. Here is what it means to "Go Red":

G: Get Your Numbers
O: Own Your Lifestyle

R: Realize Your Risk
E: Educate Your Family
D: Don't Be Silent

Watch this video that explains why you should Go Red.

Did your school, office, or depot plan a Wear Red Day in honor of women's heart health? Take a picture of your staff and **email it to Well Aware**.

Medical Plan Online Tools

Both Kaiser Permanente and Cigna offer many online tools and resources to help you on your health and wellness journey. These programs are included in your monthly premium cost, so make sure to take advantage of what is available to you!

Cigna tools

- Coaching
- Apps
- Cigna Healthy Rewards

Kaiser Permanente tools

- Coaching
- Apps (English/Spanish)
- Healthy Resources

F2F Flights to Fitness: United States Landmarks

Stair climbing can be a wonderful way to keep fit. It's live and/or work in or near a building with stairs. Stair climbing can be done anytime throughout the day as a break in your routine. The activity benefits your heart and mind, as well as your leg muscles.

Well Aware is challenging you to climb your United States landmarks, or climb the equivalent of these landmarks in flights of stairs. Form a team and complete these landmarks together to share your sense of achievement! It is a great way to stay in shape during the cold winter months.

For details, visit Well Aware's **Flights to Fitness web page**.

Stress Less This Winter

Shorter days with less sunlight combined with cold weather lead to a more sedentary lifestyle. This can make a big difference in your mood and stress levels.

Effective stress management, on the other hand, helps you break the hold that stress has on your life, so you can be happier, healthier, and more productive. The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun—and the flexibility to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on. But stress management is not one size fits all. That's why it's important to experiment and find out what works best for you.

Well Aware offers many virtual classes to help you learn tools to manage stress. From Mindfulness and Meditation, to Seated Yoga, Yoga, Stretch and Mobility, and Pilates, we offer many classes to meet your needs. **Email Well Aware** to request a monthly schedule of classes.

Take the Wellness Initiatives Reduce Your Share of Health Insurance Costs for 2025

If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan through Cigna or Kaiser Permanente, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your 2025 health insurance with the Wellness Initiatives program. To take full advantage of these rate reductions, complete a biometric health screening and a health risk assessment yearly.

The Wellness Initiatives are very simple to accomplish. To receive the maximum 2 percent reduction on your health insurance premiums in 2025, you have until October 4, 2024, to complete—

- an online health risk assessment, and
- a biometric health screening.

To find out how to complete your biometric health screening and health risk assessment, learn more about the benefits of participating, and how your results will be reported to MCPS, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives web page**.

Join Us Online for Physical Activity Classes

Physical activity or exercise can help your health and reduce the risk of developing several diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Physical activity and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. Most importantly, regular activity can improve heart and mind health, help you manage stress, and enhance your overall wellness.

Consider trying one of Well Aware's many classes to see what kind of physical activity is best for you. From Zumba, HIITCamp, to Stretch and Mobility, Core, Yoga, and toning classes, we offer many classes to meet your needs.

Email Well Aware to request the monthly schedule of classes.

Wellbeats Can Help You Get the Exercise You Need

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), only about one in five adults get enough exercise to maintain good health. If you need help fitting heart-pumping exercise into your day, you're not alone—and Wellbeats Wellness can help!

This complimentary wellness benefit houses on-demand fitness classes for all ages, abilities, and interests. In your Wellbeats Wellness account, you can explore a variety of workouts including running and walking, HIIT, cycling, kickboxing, and yoga, as well as mindfulness and nutrition classes to protect and strengthen your heart.

The AHA recommends at least 150 minutes of heart pumping exercise per week.

REMEMBER: any movement is better than none. Whether you only have a few minutes or an hour, take steps to a healthier heart today with Wellbeats Wellness. Download the Wellbeats Wellness app or visit portal.wellbeats.com. See **log-in instructions** and Wellbeats's **heart health flyer**.

Montgomery County Offers MCPS Employees Free Access to Its Recreation Facilities and Pools

As a permanent MCPS employee, you have free access to all Montgomery County (MC) recreation facilities, including swimming pools and gymnasiums. You also are eligible for a 20 percent discount on an annual pool pass for your family members.

Interested? **Learn more** and visit the **MC Recreation website** for general information. You may **apply online** for the individual Total Rec Pass. The **Employee Family Pool Pass application** also is available online. Both passes are valid for one year; you need to reapply each year to continue your access to the facilities.

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employees for all of the hard work they are doing to lead healthy lives. Share your stories and your spirit on X (formerly Twitter). Perhaps you need some extra motivation to begin a staff wellness program at your school, depot, or office, or to turn life-long unhealthy habits into healthy ones. Follow @mcpswellaware for incredible stories, wellness ideas, encouragement from your MCPS coworkers, tips on living a healthy life, or for updates on MCPS staff wellness programs.

Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Members

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create healthier habits by offering one-on-one personal coaching and the tools needed to make long-lasting health changes.

Qualifying participants receive the following:

- One-on-one support from a personal health coach.
- Easy-monitoring with a smart scale, which is yours to keep.
- Tools for managing stress and creating a healthy mindset.
- Actionable tips in weekly lessons.
- Encouragement from an online community.

For more information about the Omada program and to apply, visit omadahealth.com/mcps. Be sure to view this **two-minute video**.

Have You Accessed HFP Live?

MCPS Well Aware and Cigna have partnered to provide all MCPS staff with access to *HFP Live*, a wellness livestream and video library built specifically for employees who are hard at work.

HFP Live broadcasts webinars, workshops, demos, and fitness classes in real time and via recordings for employees to view. Each week, we will send a schedule highlighting some of the upcoming events that you can check out. You can access the livestream portal and also view the schedule of upcoming events from any computer, laptop, tablet, or cell phone by using a password-protected link. Can't make a live session? No worries. Each livestreamed event is recorded and posted in a video library for you to access for at least 30 days. **Learn more**. **Log in to participate** using password: mcpsmd#1.

Join Us for Another Virtual Staff Wellness Day

Save the Date! During the Professional Day on Wednesday, April 10, 2024, Well Aware, Healthier Generation, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna are coming together to present a virtual wellness day. Take a few minutes out of your professional day to give one of our wellness programs a try. This is a great opportunity to sample some of the classes that Well Aware hosts throughout the year, as well as to prioritize your health and wellness. Click here for the class schedule, links, and class descriptions. **Learn more**.

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