

## January Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the January 2022 issue of the *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champions, 11 elementary school teachers and staff members who volunteered to mentor student participants in the Girls on the Run Program;
- a webinar to help you identify and target unhealthy behaviors and turn healthy ones into habits that stick;
- how you can participate in the *Flights to Fitness* challenge;
- CareFirst's Heart Health webinar series;
- how to stress less this winter;
- a plan to compile our favorite healthy recipes; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

#### This month's free webinar—Ready, Set, Goal

Join us to learn to identify and target unhealthy behaviors and turn healthy ones into habits that stick.

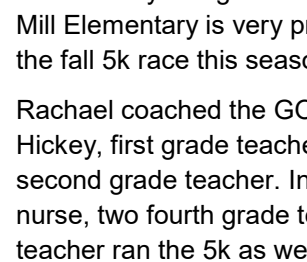
**Tuesday, January 18, 2022**  
4:30–5:30 p.m.

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**.

*Presented by:*  
Kaiser Permanente

## Wellness Champions Mentor Girls on the Run, Join Them in 5K



### Staff Members, Bells Mill Elementary School

Eleven staff members from Bells Mill Elementary School are the Well Aware wellness champions this month. They volunteered to help mentor the Girls on the Run (GOTR) program at their school. More than 30 third, fourth, and fifth grade girls ran a 5K with school staff as part of the program.

GOTR is a national non-profit organization that designs programming to strengthen third- to eighth-grade girls' social, emotional, physical, and behavioral skills so they can successfully navigate life experiences. Rachael Abramson, head coach of GOTR at Bells Mill Elementary is very proud to have had the 11 staff members mentoring and running in the fall 5K race this season!

Rachael coached the GOTR season along with Megan Lang, fifth grade teacher; Kelsey Hickey, first grade teacher; Catharine Matthews, first grade teacher; and Audrey White, second grade teacher. Including the five coaches, the school's music teacher, school nurse, two fourth grade teachers, a fifth-grade teacher, and a long-term substitute teacher ran the 5k as well. The physical education teachers rang the cowbell on the sidelines to cheer on the 30 plus girls running the race.

Rachael believes the program positively impacted her and her coworkers' health and wellness. Even though the five coaches joined the GOTR team to coach, they wound up running with the girls and other staff volunteers.

"I know many of us find it hard to carve out time to go running or take care of our physical wellness because we are working and doing other things in our daily lives," Rachael said. "The five of us who are teachers and coaches had built in time (75 minutes, twice a week, for 10 weeks) to dedicate to our physical wellness. We all got involved by running with the girls and modeling confidence and friendship. We began the season where many of the girls were, but with dedication and persistence, we were able to finish a 5K with them."

Rachael understands that movement is important for all school staff.

"Movement is important to us so we can clear our minds," Rachael said. "It was a great way to end the day on Mondays, and it was energizing to begin our day on Friday mornings."

They ran laps around the school parking lot and bus loop on Fridays beginning at 7:45 a.m. At times they split up the girls into smaller groups and other times they all practiced together.

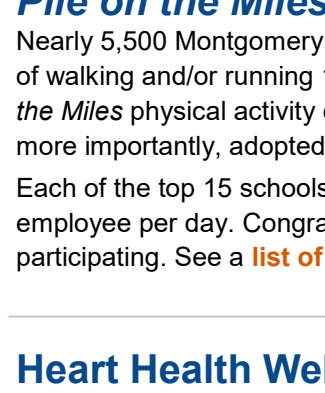
"It was great knowing I had already worked out for the day," Rachael said. "The energy on Friday mornings was amazing!"

The program energized its participants; it also helped them develop good relationships with each other.

"In an elementary school, we don't have school teams," Rachael said. "This program brought so many of us together. Girls in third-fifth grade who weren't friends, became friends. As coaches, we got to know the girls so well."

Rachael has words of inspiration for teachers and staff at other schools who are considering joining the GOTR program.

"It was a very rewarding experience for the coaches and staff who volunteered their time to be a running buddy or cheer us on at the 5K," Rachael said. "GOTR gives you all the materials you need and prepares you to be a coach. It is a great organization and a great program! It meant a lot to the girls to see their teachers and other school staff at the 5K running with them. We know we were positive role models for them—not just in the classroom but beyond it."



## Flights to Fitness: Climb America's Tallest Buildings!

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

Well Aware is challenging you to climb the tallest buildings in America, or climb the equivalent of these buildings in flights of stairs. Form a team and complete the buildings 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**.

## Take the [Wellness] Initiatives

### It Is Not Too Early to Reduce Your Share of Health Insurance Costs for 2023

If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan through CareFirst or Kaiser Permanente, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your 2023 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 2023, you have until October 7, 2022, 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 and how your results will be reported to MCPS, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives web page**.

## Pile on the Miles Challenge Comes to an End



Nearly 5,500 Montgomery County Public Schools employees set a goal of walking and/or running 100, 200, or 300 miles this fall in the *Pile on the Miles* physical activity challenge. They competed for prizes and, more importantly, adopted or maintained healthy lifestyles.

Each of the top 15 schools averaged at least 75 minutes of physical activity per employee per day. Congratulations to all those who improved their health by participating. See a **list of the winners**.

## Heart Health Webinar Series

Well Aware and CareFirst have teamed together to offer a webinar series focusing on heart health. The series is geared towards those diagnosed with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or a metabolic disease and will be held virtually.

1. **Blood Pressure: A Vital Force for Life**—Explains the importance of healthy blood pressure, risk factors for high blood pressure, and how to take control of those risks.  
Wednesday January 26, 2022  
4:30 p.m.
2. **Understanding Cholesterol: Your Key to Heart Health**—Identifies the components of cholesterol and what they mean, lifestyle factors that can impact and improve levels, and simple tips to keep cholesterol in a healthy range.  
Wednesday February 9, 2022  
4:30 p.m.
3. **Metabolic Syndrome: Are You at Risk?**—Defines metabolic syndrome, identifies who is at risk, and explains how to reduce that risk.  
Wednesday February 23, 2022  
4:30 p.m.

**Email Well Aware** to register for these classes.

## 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 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 classes virtually 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 will meet your needs. **Email Well Aware** to request a monthly schedule of classes.

## Online Physical Activity Classes for Winter

Physical activity or exercise can improve 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 your heart, your mind, and your overall wellness.

Consider trying Well Aware's online classes to see what kind of physical activity is best for you. We offer many classes to meet your needs, including Zumba, HIIT Camp, Stretch and Mobility, Core workouts, Yoga, and toning.

**Email Well Aware** for a monthly calendar of classes.

## Montgomery County Offers MCPS Employees Free Access to Its Recreation Facilities

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 may reapply each year to continue your access to the facilities.

## Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of all of the hard work that MCPS employee are doing to live a healthy and well life. It is time to share your stories and your spirit! Or, do you need motivation to start a staff wellness program or change an individual behavior? Follow @mcpswellaware and #mcpsstaffwellness for incredible stories, wellness ideas, encouragement from your MCPS coworkers, tips on living a healthy life, or updates on MCPS staff wellness activities.

## Be Well 365

Did you know MCPS has a well-being web page for its employees? This online resource is a one-stop shop where employees can find information to help them navigate and balance their work, home, personal, and community lives. The emphasis is on staff well-being and self-care. MCPS is committed to ensuring that its staff members stay safe and feel supported. **Browse Be Well 365**.

## Check Out Our Online Health and Wellness "Toolbox"

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, brings you the *Well Aware Wellness Toolbox*, a web page with many resources to help MCPS staff adjust to the return to schools and offices. These tools include physical and mental health resources, lists of free exercise and mindfulness classes, links to resources for improving sleep, nutrition, and more. MCPS staff are encouraged to take the time for self-care. Studies show that self-care is essential to well-being, especially during times of uncertainty and transition. Check out the **Well Aware Toolbox** to see what self-care resources will work best for you!

## Share Your Healthy Recipe in the Online MCPS Healthy Cookbook

Whether you have a list of resolutions or you just want to get back on track after indulging over the holidays, the new year is a great time to focus on healthy meal planning.

To help keep each other motivated, be sure to share your favorite healthy recipes with Well Aware. We will create a PDF collection to share daily on our Twitter account @mcpswellaware during the month of January.

**Email your healthy recipe to Well Aware**.