

November Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the November 2020 issue of the *Well Aware eNews*! Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champions, two third-grade teachers whose participation in Well Aware classes improved their health, inspired their students, and strengthened their friendship;
- a webinar on gaining control of sugar cravings without using willpower or deprivation;
- this year's American Diabetes Month;
- the American Heart Association's *Eat Smart Month*;
- an update on the *Going the (Physical) Distance Relay* challenge;
- November's Great American Smokeout; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar— Managing Sugar Cravings

This webinar will help participants understand why they are constantly craving sweets and how they can gain control without using willpower or deprivation.

Wednesday, November 18, 2020
 4:00–5:00 p.m.

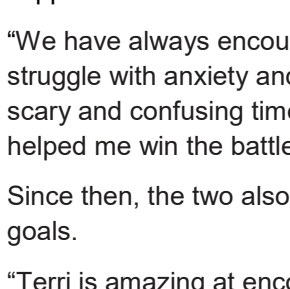
Webinar

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: CareFirst

Wellness Champions Keep Social Connection and Wellness Activities Going During Pandemic



From left: Terri Becker, Heather Kelly, Jenny Ahn, and MaryAnn Paciotti

Theresa D. Becker and Heather K. Kelly, classroom teachers, Little Bennett Elementary School

Through their wellness activities, two third-grade teachers are demonstrating the value of social connection and how it can be maintained while physically distanced during a pandemic.

Heather Kelly and Theresa "Terri" Becker have been teaching at Little Bennett Elementary School for 13 years. When Terri faced a period of depression and anxiety, she found support in Heather. Their bond has only grown since.

"We have always encouraged each other both inside and outside of school," Terri said. "My struggle with anxiety and depression began soon after meeting Heather. It was an extremely scary and confusing time. Her support, along with that from other friends and my family, helped me win the battle. Exercise, great doctors, and my faith helped too."

Since then, the two also have encouraged each other to achieve their health and wellness goals.

"Terri is amazing at encouraging me to make positive changes in my life," Heather said. "We share recipes, yoga stretches, exercise tips, everything to help us both stay motivated and on track."

This past spring, Heather and Terri enrolled in the *Mindfulness for Teachers* class with Jeff Donald, instructional specialist and mindfulness teacher. After the class, Jeff suggested they sign up for Well Aware's daily class list to learn of other mindfulness and physical activity classes.

"Terri and I are sharing the mindfulness techniques we learned with our team at Little Bennett," Heather said. "We can't be together physically due to COVID-19, but, whenever we get stressed, we remind each other of the mindfulness tips and resources we learned in class. "We also text each other daily to see what other classes are available to do via ZOOM in the afternoons."

This is Terri's 24th year of teaching. She believes that in order to take care of others, it is imperative that teachers take good care of themselves.

"I've heard others say that the importance of self-care can be likened to what is said on an airplane," Terri said. "'Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others.' Another quote I like to keep in mind is, 'You can't pour from an empty pot.' In order to be there for our students and colleagues, we must first take care of ourselves."

Heather has sometimes let stress and anxiety get the best of her.

"Stress has affected my health in various ways from difficulty sleeping to heart palpitations and high cholesterol," Heather said. "I am not one that likes to take medication, so instead I have used MCPS wellness resources to help me manage my health and wellness through meditation, breathing techniques, yoga, exercise, and hiking."

Heather's dedication has led to positive health benefits in her body and mind.

"I am now inspired to share with others what I have learned," Heather said. "My goal is that my family, friends, and students will discover the benefits from these natural techniques."

Heather and Terri have taken full advantage of the free classes offered by Well Aware.

"The variety of fabulous, free courses that the county offers is amazing," Terri said. "I have tried many of the classes, and they have all been great. It is a good way to safely stay connected to others during this time."

Heather says that every instructor is different but all are skilled, talented, and knowledgeable.

"After each class, I feel calmer and more peaceful," Heather said. "Yoga and meditation have truly been life changing for me. I am a much calmer, more centered person at home and online."

Heather feels that the social bond is not only important for feeling connected, but also for accountability.

"I am more likely to make exercise class or yoga zoom sessions a priority when others are there holding me accountable and inspiring me to work toward my health and wellness goals," Heather said.

Terri and Heather both suggest that other MCPS employees try a free MCPS Well Aware online class.

"Those of us using these services have become a small community of learners together," Terri said. "Even though we can't be together in a physical space right now, we still feel a sense of connection."

Heather's wish for all MCPS employees is a willingness to put themselves out there, ask for help, attend online classes, join a gym, and find friends with common interests and goals.

"We need to support each other," Heather said. "Sometimes that means inviting others into our lives so we can be supportive friends who encourage and enlighten those around us. Just like my team and dear friend, Terri, do for me."

To receive the list of virtual classes, **email Well Aware**

November Is American Diabetes Month

Observed every November, American Diabetes Month is an important part of the American Diabetes Association's efforts to focus our nation's attention on the disease and the tens of millions of people affected by it.

Because there is no cure for diabetes, the focus is on prevention. If you have risk factors or **symptoms**, or are pre-diabetic, the following are ways to prevent or delay onset of diabetes:

Get physically active. Just 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, five times a week, reduces your risk of diabetes. If you haven't been active, start with 5–10 minutes a day and gradually work your way up to 30 minutes.

Eat healthy. It may seem hard to eat healthy if you are on a budget or always crunched for time. You are more likely to adopt healthy eating habits if you start with small changes. Look for ways to make your meals healthy by choosing—

- Non-starchy vegetables—carrots, broccoli, green beans, kale, and cauliflower
- Lean meats—skinless chicken and turkey and lean cuts of pork and beef
- Low-fat dairy products—skim milk and fat-free yogurts
- Whole grains—brown rice, barley, farro, and quinoa
- Healthy fats in small amounts—olive, canola, sunflower, and peanut oil

If you smoke or use tobacco—quit.

Here is additional educational information on diabetes:

- **Gestational Diabetes**
- **Preventing Type 2 Diabetes**

InStep with Diabetes is Back!

Well Aware and Kaiser Permanente have teamed together to offer a four-week educational diabetes program called InStep with Diabetes. It is geared towards those diagnosed with diabetes to help control the disease as well as those with pre-diabetes to help prevent a further diagnosis. Are you interested in participating in the next session? **Email Well Aware** and we will update you on the dates and locations of upcoming classes.

Eat Smart Month

Take simple steps to eat healthier by celebrating Eat Smart Month in November. Throughout the month, the American Heart Association is urging Americans to take the first step to commit to healthier eating. Review these **tips to healthy eating during the holidays**.

MCPS has partnered with Giant Food's *Giant Nutrition* webinar series and weekly challenge. To register for the webinars, **email Well Aware**.

Date and Time	Nutrition Topic	Nutrition Challenge	Movement Challenge
Monday, November 9 4:30 p.m.	Spice Up Your Life!	Try a new spice this week OR use your favorite spice in a new way	Stretch it out for 10 minutes each day, while watching television, talking on the phone, etc.
Monday, November 16 4:30 p.m.	Holiday Eating Strategies	Aim for one plant-based day per week	Aim to take 10,000 steps per day—use your phone apps, fitness trackers, watches, whatever works best for you



Going the (Physical) Distance Relay Update

The fall physical activity challenge, *Going the (Physical) Distance Relay*, is well under way! With 150+ teams registered, there is a lot of school and team competition for the grand prize grants. It is not too late to join. The *Going the (Physical) Distance Relay* challenge is not only getting MCPS employees moving, but helping coworkers stay connected. **Learn more.**

The Great American Smokeout Will Be Here Soon!

Quitting smoking is not easy. It takes time and a plan. You don't have to stop smoking in one day; you just start with one day. Let this year's **Great American Smokeout** on **November 19** be the day you start your journey toward a smoke-free life. You will be joining thousands of smokers across the country in taking an important step toward a healthier life and reducing your cancer risk. Plus, the American Cancer Society has the **resources and support** you need to quit.

Quitting smoking has immediate and long-term benefits at any age. Quitting is hard, but you can increase your chances of success with help. Getting help through counseling or medications can double or triple your chance of quitting successfully.

Quitting starts here. Begin day one with these many resources to help you take the first step to being tobacco free.

In addition, Well Aware has a free tobacco cessation program for MCPS employees and their spouses. Our next virtual class starts in December. If you are interested in registering for the next class, please **email Well Aware**.

You Can Take the [Wellness] Initiative for 2022 as Early as ... Now!

Each year you have an opportunity to save on your health insurance premiums by participating in the Wellness Initiatives program. By completing a biometric health screening and filling out your medical plan's online health risk assessment, MCPS will pay 2 percent more of your health insurance premiums. For more information, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives for Employees website**.

Avoid the rush next fall. Begin taking the [wellness] initiative for 2022 now!

Stress Less This Fall

If you are living with high levels of stress, you are putting your entire well-being at risk. Stress wreaks havoc on your emotional wellness, as well as your physical health. It makes it harder to think clearly, function effectively, and enjoy life.

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, you are sure to find something that will meet your individual needs. **Email Well Aware** to request a monthly schedule of classes.

Online Physical Activity Classes for Fall

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.

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

Email Well Aware for a monthly calendar of classes.

This Year, Getting a Flu Shot Could Be More Important Than Ever

Flu season is here. Ranging from October through April, an estimated 5-20 percent of Americans get the flu each year with symptoms lasting up to two weeks. An annual seasonal flu vaccine is the best way to help protect against the flu.

Both CareFirst and Kaiser Permanente have laid out detailed plans for getting this year's flu shot.

- **CareFirst Regional Flu Network**
- **CareFirst National Flu Network**
- **Kaiser Permanente Flu Shots**

Cooking Demonstration: Make Your Thanksgiving Dinner Healthier This Year

Join Well Aware for a cooking demonstration on Zoom to learn how to make healthy alternatives to Thanksgiving favorites.

Zoom Cooking Demonstration
 Wednesday, November 11, 2020
 4:30–5:30 p.m.

Email Well Aware to request Zoom sign-in details and a list of recipes and ingredients.

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.

Montgomery County Government offers this access to its facilities to MCPS employees as part of an overall effort to promote the health and well-being of county employees. By encouraging participation in physical activity to reduce stress and enhance fitness, the county's promotion aligns well with Well Aware's wellness programs.

Interested? **Learn more** and visit the **MC Recreation website** for general information. You may **apply online** for the individual 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.

For more information, contact MC Government at 240-777-6840 or **email MC Recreation**.

Share Your Wellness Stories with Us Via Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of all of the hard work that MCPS employees are doing to live healthy and well lives. It is time to share your stories and your spirit via Twitter! Perhaps you need motivation to start exercising, change a behavior that is negatively impacting your health, or begin a virtual staff wellness program.

Follow @mcpsswellaware for incredible stories, wellness ideas, and encouragement from your MCPS coworkers. Read tips on living a healthy life and updates on MCPS staff wellness programs.