

January Well Aware eNews

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



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—

10 Habits of Healthy People

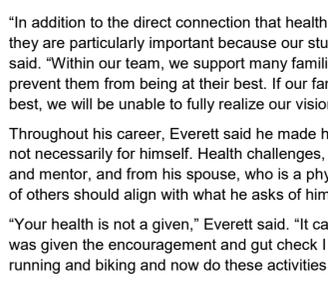
Simple lifestyle changes can make a big difference in disease prevention and overall health. Explore the 10 habits that healthy people practice the most, and learn how you can easily incorporate these actions into your life.

Wednesday, January 24, 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 Win an MCPS on the Move Grand Prize and, Most Importantly, Their Health



Mr. Everett M. Davis, director; Ms. Giuseppina Alving, Mrs. Arelis A. Burke, Mrs. Maribel De La Cruz, and Ms. Evelyn Zuniga-Sanchez, parent community coordinators, Student, Family, and School Services

Members of the *MCPS on the Move* team from the Office of Student, Family, and School Services spent the fall encouraging one another during the physical activity challenge and it paid off. Mr. Everett M. Davis, director; Ms. Giuseppina Alving, Mrs. Arelis A. Burke, Mrs. Maribel De La Cruz, and, Ms. Evelyn Zuniga-Sanchez, parent community coordinators on the Student, Family, and School Services (SFSS) team won a grand prize for their collective efforts.

Everett could not help but notice his staff's increased motivation to improve their health and wellness. He also was fully aware of the team's commitment to helping others embrace a healthier lifestyle. They all have gained an understanding of the importance of health and wellness to the work their team does at MCPS.

"In addition to the direct connection that health and wellness have to culture and climate, they are particularly important because our students and families deserve the best," Everett said. "Within our team, we support many families who are navigating challenges that prevent them from being at their best. If our families, students, and staff are not at their best, we will be unable to fully realize our vision and mission."

Throughout his career, Everett said he made health and wellness a priority for others, but not necessarily for himself. Health challenges, and encouragement from a former principal and mentor, and from his spouse, who is a physician, helped him realize that what he asks of others should align with what he asks of himself. He decided to lead by example.

"Your health is not a given," Everett said. "It can be taken away and it must be nurtured. I was given the encouragement and gut check I needed to change my ways. I rediscovered running and biking and now do these activities on a regular basis."

Other members of the SFSS *MCPS on the Move* team shared their thoughts on the fall challenge.

"Participating in this enjoyable and healthy competition presented us with a fantastic opportunity to push our limits," Evelyn said. "The prospect of winning prizes served as a motivator."

Cynthia discovered a number of positive impacts as a result of participating in *MCPS on the Move*.

"Engaging in various activities like walks, hikes, and Zumba allowed us, as colleagues, to connect on a personal level while witnessing the competitive spirit within our team," Cynthia said. "Our shared focus on fitness goals, along with the anticipation of tracking our progress, created a sense of excitement. We held each other accountable, and the thrill of winning the grand prize has sparked increased interest, with more colleagues eager to join the next challenge."

Maria has advice for offices and schools looking to start a health and wellness program for staff.

"Encourage one another on the journey to health and wellness, and don't hesitate to invite colleagues to join the fitness competition," Maria said. "Motivational emails served as valuable support, fostering a sense of connection and commitment to our shared well-being goals."

Everett has advice for school and office leadership.

"Meet your team and yourself where you are (even if it's by the coffee maker with a donut or a cookie in your hand)," Everett said. "No step is too small, and it's never too late to start new routines. Find a champion for this effort. Empower this individual/group to lead the charge and start a movement. Look to others who have successfully done this work. What can be learned or adapted from their efforts? It can truly be a game changer on many levels. Secure an accountability partner/cheerleader."

SFSS has plans to further enhance their health and wellness activities.

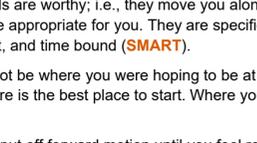
"We are going to coordinate even more fun and engaging activities," Arelis said. "We are also going to encourage the entire SFSS family to join our team in fostering a sense of enjoyment, health, and wellness together."

Everett agrees.

"We will continue to embed health and wellness as a theme/through line for our work, including in our Office Improvement Plan (OIP)," Everett said. "We will continue to provide opportunities for regularly scheduled wellness check-ins, including a wellness retreat, for the team. In addition, we will seek support from in-house experts. The Employee Assistance Program and Well Aware are great resources and champions for this work and have been great partners along the SFSS health and wellness journey."

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

Monthly Connection: New Year, New Goals



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*.

New Year, New Goals Month

Many people choose to set health and well-being goals for the New Year. You might choose to start a new hobby, add more movement, prioritize mental health, change eating habits, improve sleep hygiene, or another supportive goal. It can be daunting and overwhelming to change your routine while balancing work and personal demands. Work-life balance strategies can help support you as you integrate these New Year goals with your already busy life.

EAP Resources

Consider the following work-life balance suggestions:

- Read Mental Health America's **tips on creating work-life balance**.
- Make a list of well-being activities you enjoy that you can infuse into your day at work and outside of work. Here some examples to get you started:

At work:

- Take a stretch break after a meeting or class period.
- Connect with colleagues and friends at work.
- Make time to eat lunch without multitasking.
- Read during your break.
- Go for a quick walk either outside or around the building.
- Pause for a mindful moment between classes or meetings.
- Drink water throughout the day.
- Climb a flight of stairs.

Outside of Work:

- Take your pet for a walk.
- Join a community sports team.
- Volunteer in your community.
- Connect on the phone or virtually with a long-distance friend or family member.
- Tap into your creative side and make art.
- Take a nap.
- Create a new recipe.
- Join a book club.

Well Aware Resources

An effective approach to achieving your goals includes these four things:

1. Set appropriate goals. Good goals are worthy; i.e., they move you along the road toward your destination. They are appropriate for you. They are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound (**SMART**).
2. Begin where you are. You may not be where you were hoping to be at this point in time, but no matter. Where you are is the best place to start. Where you are gives you clarity on what to do next.
3. Begin with what you have. Don't put off forward motion until you feel ready, or until you can afford it. Use what you have now: your knowledge, your skill, your experience, your desire. Do what you know to do. Build from there.
4. Schedule your goals. Give each goal a deadline. Then, break it down into smaller steps and schedule each step on your calendar. On the day you have planned to do a step, do it.

F2F Flights to Fitness: United States Landmarks

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 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 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**.

Improve Your Running This Winter via a Webinar Series

Have you joined our spring or fall virtual running program to train for a 5k race? This winter, join Well Aware and the Run Farther and Faster coaches for a four-week webinar series to improve your running. This series will help you focus on running topics to get you ready to train for spring races. It is perfect for beginners or advanced runners. Topics will include: General Training Principles, Nutrition, Strength, Stretching, Goal Setting, and more. **Email Well Aware** for the webinar schedule.

Take the Wellness Initiatives It Is Not Too Early to 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, more about the benefits of participating, and how your results will be reported to MCPS, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives web page**.

The MCPS on the Move Challenge Has Ended

More than 5,000 Montgomery County Public Schools employees spent the fall in reach of their goals during the *MCPS on the Move* physical activity challenge. They competed for prizes, and more importantly, adopted or maintained healthy lifestyles. Each of the top 15 schools averaged at least 76 minutes of physical activity per employee per day.

Congratulations to all those who improved their health by participating! Stay tuned for the spring challenge, which will begin in March.

Group Forming Now for Winter Session of Head, Heart, and Hand

Registration is under way for the winter session of *Head, Heart, and Hand*, a fun and inspiring program that gives participants the knowledge, tools, and support to lose weight permanently and reach their health goals.

This 12-week wellness program is a comprehensive program of learning with weekly group coaching, designed to help participants prevent/reverse disease, improve their physical and mental health, and lose weight. This holistic program targets the root causes of common chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, arthritis, and more, while addressing all aspects of health, including nutrition, sleep, stress, mental health, and mindset.

Email Well Aware for more information and to register.

Another Virtual Staff Wellness Day is Coming!

On the professional day to be held Monday, January 29, 2024, Well Aware, Healthier Generation, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna will come together to present a virtual staff 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 prioritize your health and wellness. See the **class descriptions and schedule** or **email Well Aware** for details.

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 Wellbeats This Year!

A new year brings a new opportunity to set goals and commit to change. Well Aware and Wellbeats is challenging you this month to set physical and mental health goals.

If you are looking for a well-rounded, holistic wellness plan that does not require a lot of time or commitment, this program is perfect for you. All you need to do is join the program and Wellbeats' expert-led, virtual trainers will guide you every step of the way. Enter and complete the challenge for a chance to win a gift card! See **this flyer** with instructions for joining us.

Stress Less During the Holidays

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 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.

Join Us for Online Physical Activity Classes

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 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 and HITCamp, to Stretch and Mobility, Core, Yoga, and toning classes, we offer many classes to meet your needs.

Email Well Aware to request the full schedule of classes.

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.

Well Aware Toolbox

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, brings you the Well Aware Wellness Toolbox, a web page with many resources to help staff live healthy and well lives. 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!**

Let Us Help You Quit for Good

The U.S. Surgeon General has said, "Smoking cessation [stopping smoking] represents the single most important step that smokers can take to enhance the length and quality of their lives."

It's hard to quit smoking, but you can do it. To have the best chance of quitting and remaining a nonsmoker, you need to know what you're up against, what your options are, and where to go for help. We can help!

Well Aware and Kaiser Permanente have teamed up to offer a three-week virtual tobacco cessation class, *Quit for Good*, for MCPS staff and their significant others. The next class begins on January 17, 2024. **Learn more**.

MCPS Receives American Heart Association's Workforce Well-being Gold Recognition

The American Heart Association, a global force for healthier lives for all, has awarded Montgomery County Public Schools gold-level recognition for its commitment to employee health and well-being as measured in the Association's 2023 Workforce Well-being Scorecard™.

The Scorecard brings together the latest research and insights from industry experts to help business leaders build a science-backed, employee-centric culture of health and well-being. The tool allows employers to evaluate how their policies and procedures compare to leading best practices in areas such as mental health support, addressing burnout, financial well-being, health equity considerations and more. Companies that complete the Scorecard receive a recognition level based on their alignment with established guidance, along with actionable strategies to support improvement and a dashboard to benchmark their progress against peer organizations.

Championing well-being, and a healthy mind, heart, and body for employees is good for their health and good for organizational outcomes. In general, healthy employees are more productive and use less sick time. Organizations who create a culture of health in the workplace can improve employee retention and organizational reputation.

To learn more and view a full list of recognized organizations, visit **Well-being Works Better™**.

The employee wellness newsletter is brought to you by the Employee and Retiree Service Center (ERSC). Learn more about employee wellness by visiting our **website**. View this email newsletter as a **PDF document**. Questions or comments about your employee wellness program? Contact ERSC at 301-517-8100 or **email Well Aware**.