

March Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the March 2023 issue of *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champion, a physical education teacher who has served as the wellness leader at his school for many years, making wellness part of the school's everyday culture and benefiting both students and staff;
- a webinar on meal preparation techniques to save time, money, and calories;
- a new physical activity challenge for spring;
- National Nutrition Month;
- Diabetes Alert Day;
- Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar— Meal Prep and Kitchen Hacks

The idea of meal preparation may seem overwhelming, but the reality is that it saves time, money, and calories. Learn how you can cut the amount of time in your kitchen without sacrificing flavor. Benefit from worthwhile meal prep techniques and other kitchen hacks!

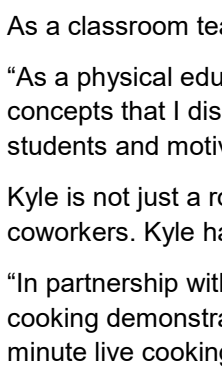
Thursday, March 23, 2023
4:30 p.m.

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 Champion Leads Staff and Students Toward Healthier Lifestyles



Mr. Kyle J. Finke,
physical education teacher, Harmony Hills Elementary School

Kyle J. Finke

Kyle Finke, physical education teacher at Harmony Hills Elementary School, has been the staff and student wellness leader at his school for many years. From encouraging staff through the spring and fall challenges, to organizing a staff cooking demonstration, Kyle has made staff wellness at Harmony Hills Elementary School a part of its everyday culture.

As a classroom teacher, personal health and wellness are important to Kyle.

"As a physical education teacher, I want to embody the instructional goals and well-being concepts that I discuss with my students," Kyle said. "I strive to be a role model for my students and motivate them to live a healthy lifestyle."

Kyle is not just a role model for Harmony Hills Elementary School students, but also for his coworkers. Kyle has set up many healthy opportunities for his coworkers to learn and grow.

"In partnership with Well Aware and Cigna, we were able to provide the staff with live cooking demonstrations throughout the school day," Kyle said. "Teachers engaged in 15-minute live cooking demos that left staff filled with nutritional knowledge and a delicious snack on the go. Once a month, we organize food trucks to visit the school so staff can find the time to fill their buckets and their bellies," Kyle said.

Kyle rewards his coworkers for keeping a healthy lifestyle.

"We are also starting a morning fitness club for staff to participate in a variety of activities such as ping-pong, pickleball, switch sports, and more," Kyle said. "Additionally, we have offered staff exercise classes, established accountability partners, led active team builders at staff meetings, and have had great participation in the school kickball and softball leagues. Lastly, we have a "Wellness Wheel" that staff can spin and earn rewards like class coverage, duty coverage, or extra recess for their class."

Kyle believes that school staff, as well as students, should develop their personal health and wellness.

"Teaching is a very demanding job, so it is important for staff to be in a good place mentally and physically to be able to provide the best environment and instruction for students," Kyle said. "School staff are role models for students, and it is important to help students create healthy habits early on."

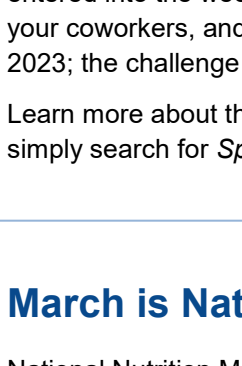
Kyle has advice for schools looking to start a staff wellness program.

"My biggest advice is to get a sense of what your staff needs," Kyle said. "Ask around, send surveys, and gauge where their interests lie. Just like our students, staff will be more likely to participate if it's something they're interested in." Kyle said.

Kyle encourages all staff to participate in the variety of wellness activities MCPS provides and pursue collaborations with other schools that have successful wellness programs.

"Additionally, don't be afraid to network and reach out to the plethora of wellness resources MCPS offers," Kyle said. "Connect with other schools and collaborate with those you see implementing activities that would benefit your staff and school."

A New Physical Activity Challenge for Spring: Spring Forward



On Sunday, March 12, 2023, we will "spring forward" to enter Daylight Saving Time. The time change often leaves our internal clock out of sync, along with all of the hormones and body functions that rely on it. And yes, we will lose an hour of sleep the night before.

But there is some good news: Exercise helps! Movement and timing help reset your body's clock. Be sure to exercise in the mornings or early afternoons.

In the process of resetting our internal clocks, we can spring forward our fitness routines!

To that end, Well Aware is challenging you to dedicate your time and energy this spring to establish and maintain a regular fitness routine through its *Spring Forward* physical activity challenge. Remember that adding fitness to your life does not mean hours in the gym. It can simply mean a two-minute walk. The goal of the challenge will be to complete the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommendation of 150 minutes of moderate activity per week over the six-week challenge.

The *Spring Forward* challenge continues Well Aware's goal of building long-lasting healthy habits. Consider forming a team with your coworkers and work together to encourage and support each other through the six-week challenge.

Log at least 30 minutes of activity per day in the online **Well Aware Fitness Log** to be entered into the weekly prize drawing. Increase your physical activity, connect socially with your coworkers, and win grant prize money. Registration begins on Monday, March 6, 2023; the challenge begins on Monday, March 13, 2023.

Learn more about the *Spring Forward* challenge by visiting the **Well Aware web page**, or simply search for *Spring Forward wellness challenge* from any MCPS web page.

March is National Nutrition Month

National Nutrition Month is a nutrition education and information campaign held annually in March by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, formerly the American Dietetic Association. The campaign focuses on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

The theme for the 2023 National Nutrition Month is *Fuel for the Future*. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition and health. We are all unique with different bodies, goals, backgrounds, and tastes!

The Academy recommends nutritious foods with physical activity's most physical activity guidelines, adults should participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week.

How will you celebrate National Nutrition Month? Get creative and send us a picture of how your school/office/depot chose to have a healthy celebration.

This Year's National Walking Day is April 5, 2023

The first Wednesday in April is National Walking Day. Since 2007, the American Heart Association (AHA) has sponsored this day to remind people about the health benefits of taking a walk. Wear your sneakers—or take them with you—and take a 30-minute walk before or after your work day, or during a break.

Did you know—

- Less than 48 percent of adults in the US get enough aerobic exercise to improve their health. Aerobic exercise includes walking. Get outside and get that heart rate up!
- All it takes is 15 minutes of walking to actually curb a craving for chocolate or other sweet-related foods. Next time you are looking for something sweet, take a walk around the block.
- A study found that those who walked 20 minutes per day for five days a week reported taking nearly 50 percent fewer sick days than those who exercised once per week or less.

How will your school or office celebrate the event? **Email your stories and photos to ERSC. Find out why walking is the most popular form of exercise.**

A Diabetes Wake-up Call: Are You at Risk?

One in three Americans is at risk for developing type 2 diabetes, a serious disease that can lead to complications such as kidney disease, blindness, and amputations. But type 2 diabetes doesn't have to be permanent; it can be prevented or delayed with healthy lifestyle modifications.

Be sure to participate in the American Diabetes Association Alert Day on March 28, 2023. Held the fourth Tuesday of March each year, the American Diabetes Association Alert Day is a one-day wake-up call asking Americans to take a Diabetes Risk Test to find out if they are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes. The Diabetes Risk Test asks participants to answer simple questions about weight, age, family history, and other potential risk factors for prediabetes or Ttype 2 diabetes. Preventive tips are provided for everyone who takes the test. Those at high risk are encouraged to talk with their health care provider.

- **Take the type 2 Diabetes Risk Test now!**
- **Learn risk factors for type 2 diabetes**

Wellness Initiatives: Get to Know Your Numbers

We live our lives by the numbers: phone numbers, PIN numbers, and our social security numbers.

But do you know the heart health numbers that could literally save your life? Healthy numbers mean a healthy heart. If you follow a healthy lifestyle—eat a balanced diet, get regular exercise, and avoid smoking—you can turn any bad numbers around.

You can learn about these vital health numbers and reduce your financial contribution to your health insurance by participating in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Wellness Initiatives program. To take full advantage of the program, complete a biometric health screening* and health risk assessment yearly.

To find out how to complete your biometric health screening and health risk assessment, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives web page**. **See a schedule of on-site biometric health screenings.**

** Please note that Biometrics Incentive Alternative training, which has provided an alternative to the biometric health screening since 2020 due to COVID-19, will NOT be offered in 2023. Employees will need to complete a biometric health screening and their medical plan's health risk assessment to receive full Wellness Initiatives credit for 2024.*

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Colon cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women combined in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that this year 95,520 people will be diagnosed with colon cancer, 39,910 will be diagnosed with rectal cancer, and 50,260 will die from this disease.

On average, the lifetime risk of developing colon cancer is about one in 23 for men and women combined (4.5 percent). This varies widely according to individual risk factors, however.

With regular screenings, colon cancer can be found early, when treatment is most effective. In many cases, screening can prevent colon cancer by finding and removing polyps before they become cancer.

And if cancer is present, earlier detection means a chance at a longer life. Generally, the more advanced colon cancer is at detection, the lower the five-year survival rates are.

Since the mid-1980s, the colon cancer survival rate has been increasing, due in part to increased awareness and screening. By finding polyps and cancer in the earlier stages, it is easiest to treat. Improved treatment options have also contributed to a rise in survival rates.

Learn more about colorectal screenings.

Physical Activities Class to Improve Your Wellness

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, help you manage your stress, and your overall wellness.

This spring, Well Aware is continuing our online live and recorded classes for your convenience. From Zumba and HIITCamp, to yoga and core workouts, there is something for everyone. Give them all a try to see what you like best.

Email Well Aware to get the full schedule of classes. Register for the daily wellness email to stay up to date on class links, and updates. **Opt-in to this email distribution list.**

Stress Less this Spring

Are you under any stress? You are not alone. Stress not only affects you emotionally, but it also greatly impacts 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.

This spring, Well Aware is continuing to offer online live and recorded classes for your convenience. From mindfulness to seated yoga, yoga, and tai chi, we offer many classes to meet your needs. **Email Well Aware** for a monthly calendar of classes. **Opt in** to our wellness email distribution list.

Spring 5k Training Program

Running is an accessible, inexpensive and effective way to improve your health and fitness, relieve stress, and boost your confidence. Whether you have never run or it's been a while since you last ran, spring is the perfect time to start training!

Following a successful fall session, the Run Farther & Faster MCPS Spring Virtual Group 5k Training Program will begin on April 11, 2023, and run through June 17, 2023. Participants will receive a comprehensive 10-week training calendar, weekly emails with training support and running-related information, as well as the ability to email certified training coaches with questions or concerns. The training calendar begins with run/walk intervals and progresses safely and gradually towards continuous running. It also includes strength workouts and form drills. For those who are interested, participants also have access to a private Facebook group to facilitate finding running partners.

This program is appropriate for new runners or runners who are returning after a hiatus. Space is limited to the first 50 registrants. **Register here by March 24, 2023, and learn more.**

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employees for all of the hard work they are doing to lead healthy lives. It is time to share your stories and your spirit! Or, 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

Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Studies show that self-care is essential to wellbeing, especially during times of uncertainty and transition.

The Well Aware Wellness Toolbox is a one-stop shop to find all of the free resources for you to manage your health and wellness. 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.

Check out the Well Aware Toolbox to see what self-care resources will work best for you!

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** by visiting 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.

Virtual Staff Wellness Day

During the Professional Day on Friday April 21, 2023, Well Aware, Healthier Generation, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna are coming together to present a virtual wellness day! Take a few minutes out of this 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! Click here for the class schedule, links, and class descriptions. **Learn more.**

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**.