Well Aware eNews

The education you need for the health you want

December Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the December issue of the *Well Aware* eNewsletter! Read on to learn about:

- this month's wellness champion, an ESOL teacher whose high school students have inspired her coworkers to eat right and move more;
- a semi-annual reminder on sources of holiday stress and how to minimize them;
- another chance to *Quit for Good*;
- how to step into the Sweet-Free Zone;
- how to stay well during the holidays;
- a way to share your wellness success stories and receive encouragement from your coworkers; and
- more!

Wellness Champion's Energy, Motivation, and Creativity Help Her Persuade Coworkers to Embrace Their Wellness

Michelle Cohen, ESOL teacher, Rosemont Elementary School

If you are looking for ways to boost health and wellness among the staff at your school, depart, or office, look to Michelle Cohen, ESOL teacher at Rosemont Elementary School. Ms. Cohen's energy, motivation, and creativity have helped her persuade her Rosemont coworkers into eating right and moving more.

Participating in the MCPS wellness program is important to the teachers and staff at Rosemont Elementary because we all work so hard with, and on behalf, of the kids in our building," Michelle said.

Michelle and her coworkers know that taking time to pay attention to their physical and emotional well-being is key to their success as educators. Exercising and eating right helps them to maintain their energy and enthusiasm for working with students.

Supporting each other in the process strengthens our ability to maintain our healthy lifestyles," Michelle said. "Best of all, by making staying healthy fun, we can keep those day-to-day stresses under control and remain focused on our professional and personal lives."

Michelle's coworkers speak very highly of her efforts, which they say have been instrumental in keeping them motivated. Referring to her as their "wellness leader," one colleague shared a number of activities that Michelle has planned and implemented.

Michelle serves as inspiration and makes fun in those challenges by providing cute and fun prizes and invested in our health and wellness," Ariel S. Paul, speech pathologist, said. "Tomato Thursday is the Friday before our Friday pot-luck lunch. Tomato Tuesday is not. Monday is supposed to be a salad for lunch."

Tomato Thursday prizes are taken and shared with the team members, and prizes are awarded for the best sticks.

Over time, Michelle has increased the difficulty-level of the in-house challenges. It began with small incentives, such as the Well Aware Fitness Log (see below) and Fitness Bingo. Then she introduced *Fit Friday*.

This part of the in-house program rounds out the work week, and staff agree it is the best part. Team members gather for a quick group exercise geared toward either physical or mental health. The first was a *30 Second Plank Challenge*, followed by a *Guided Meditation*.

"We enjoy the surprise activities and are glad to support each other in getting and staying healthy," Ariel said. "We always look forward to *Fit Friday*."

Well Wellness Programs awards Michelle for her leadership, but she truly does need no prompt to encourage her coworkers to eat healthy and move more. Her efforts have been recognized by her peers and her supervisor, who shared a number of activities that Michelle has planned and implemented.

"Our wellness program brings us together," Michelle said. "The team includes new and returning staff members, teachers from all grade levels, and non-teaching staff. It has athletes and non-athletes, smokers, vegetarians, and junk food lovers."

What they have in common is the need for an accountability buddy to make sure they all show up.

"There's no need for special equipment," Michelle said. "All we need is little bit of energy, a leader who doesn't let the group give up on itself, and the willingness to let go of the expected. Getting fit, having fun, and feeling fabulous are our goals. These can be your goals, too!"

Enter the Sweet-free Zone!

Again this year, Well Aware is challenging you to designate your school or office as a Sweet-free Zone. Sugary treats are not healthy for anyone, and they are especially not healthy for people who are trying to lose weight. Plan to designate your school or office as a Sweet-free Zone and share suggestions on how to change the culture in your school or office. Are you doing something to reduce the influx of sweet and treats in your work location? Be sure to let us know, and **email your photos to Well Aware!**

Minutes in Motion Challenge Wraps Up; Prizes to Be Announced Next Week

Since September 23, 2019, MCPS employees have been working to achieve the goals they set during the *Minutes in Motion* physical activity challenge. Across MCPS, employees are experiencing better health and morale because of their involvement, whether they are participating as individuals or as members of a team.

Be sure to look for *Minutes in Motion* grand prize winners in the December 11th issue of *The Bulletin*.

Although the challenge ended on December 1, 2019, our winter *Flights to Fitness* challenge will begin in January. We'll also more opportunities to use the online **Well Aware Fitness Log** to enter your daily activity, weight loss, sleep, and more.

It Is Always a Good Time to Quit!

Are you ready to quit? Quit for Good, Well Aware's free tobacco cessation program for MCPS employees and their spouses, can help. *Quit for Good* is a free, eight-week tobacco cessation class that MCPS staff and their spouses. The class covers everything from nicotine replacement therapy, coping techniques, stress management, nutrition, and more.

Tobacco-users who complete the *Quit for Good* tobacco cessation program can have the 25 percent tobacco user surcharge waived and, depending on when the program is completed, refunded. **Learn more.**

The next class will begin in January. For more information on the *Quit for Good* tobacco cessation program, visit the ***Quit for Good* web page. Email Well Aware** to reserve your spot in the class.

Save on Your Health Insurance in 2021: Take the **Wellness** Initiative

If you want to pay less for employee-provided medical insurance plan, you can learn more about the benefits and reduce your contributions to your health insurance with the Wellness Initiative program. To take full advantage of these incentive reductions, complete a biometric health screening and a health risk assessment yearly, and, if you use tobacco, consider quitting.

The Wellness Initiatives are easy to complete. To earn the maximum two percent incentive reduction from your health insurance premiums, you need to complete a yearly—

- online health risk assessment, and
- biometric health screening

To find out how and when to complete your assessment and screening, more about the benefits of participating, and if any Wellness Initiatives information is reported to MCPS, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page**. Well Aware will offer health screenings onsite again this year to help you hit the **full** 1 percent incentive. For dates and times, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives web page**.

Stress Less This Fall!

Are the holidays stressing you out? Join Well Aware for one or more of the following classes and learn better to manage your stress.

Mindfulness and Meditation
Mondays through December 16 (except holidays)
5:00–5:45 p.m.
Conference Room 223
Carver Educational Services Center
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20850
Register here

Seated Yoga
Wednesdays through December 18
4:45 p.m.
Café 45
45 West Gude Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20850
Register here

Yoga
Fridays through December 20
12:30 p.m.
Main Gym
Redland Middle School
6505 Muncaster Mill Road
Rockville, Maryland 20855
Register here

Yoga
Fridays through December 13
2:50 p.m.
Dance Studio
Springbrook High School
2201 Valley Brook Drive
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904
Register here

Yoga
Wednesday, December 11
3:30 p.m.
Weight Room
William H. Farquhar Middle School
17017 Batchellors Forest Road
Olney, Maryland 20832
Register here

Yoga
Mondays and Thursdays through December 19
5:00 p.m.
Dance Studio Room
Rocking Horse Road Center
4910 Macon Road
Rockville, Maryland 20852
Register here

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 your heart, your mind, and your overall wellness. Consider trying one of the classes below to see what kind of physical activity is best for you!

Zumba
Fridays
4:30–5:30 p.m.
Washington Grove Elementary School
8712 Oakmont Street
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877
Register here

Zumba
Mondays
4:00 p.m.
Cafeteria
Carver Educational Services Center
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20850
Register here

Zumba
Tuesdays and Thursdays
3:00–4:00 p.m.
Dance Studio
John F. Kennedy High School
1901 Randolph Road
Silver Spring, Maryland 20902
Register here

Zumba
Tuesdays
4:30–5:30 p.m.
Gymnasium
Wheaton Woods Elementary School
4010 Faroe Place
Rockville, Maryland 20853
Register here

Zumba
Mondays
4:30–5:30 p.m.
Gymnasium
Flora Singer Elementary School
2900 Hayden Drive
Silver Spring, Maryland 20902
Register here

Zumba
Fridays
5:00 p.m.
Multipurpose Room
Rocking Horse Road Center
4910 Macon Road
Rockville, Maryland 20852
Register here

Holiday Wellness

Make the most wonderful time of year a safe and healthy time of year. With just a little preparation and caution, your holidays can be memorable for all the good reasons. Here are some tips on staying healthy, safe and stress free.

Don't skimp on sleep. Lack of sleep getting ready for the holidays. Lack of sleep leads to—

- overeating and weight gain;
- safety hazards at home, work, and on the road; and
- a negative mood.

Holidays mean lots of time spent with others, mostly indoors. Whether it's shopping or social events, indoor activity is prime time to spread common colds and the flu. Some ways to avoid getting or giving viruses include:

- washing your hands with soap and water for at least for 20 seconds;
- covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze; (If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow.)
- getting the flu vaccine; and
- keeping your immune system strong by staying physically active, eating healthy, and limiting alcohol.

(You don't have to say no to all of the holiday treats, just don't overindulge.)

Often, on our own or with the media's help, we create unrealistic expectations. If not kept in check, holiday commitments and spending can lead to stress. Ways to manage holiday stress include—

- balancing work, home, and social activities;
(Remember: It is okay to say no.)
- asking for support from family—including your children—and friends;
- taking time to relax—even for just a few minutes—to recharge;
- getting plenty of sleep; and
- creating a budget for purchasing gifts, food, and decorations.

Flights to Fitness to Return in January

Flights to Fitness (FTF) is a program designed to encourage physical activity MCPS employees through star climbing. Stay tuned for more information on the latest *Flights to Fitness* challenge starting in January!

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employee 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 the life back into healthy habits. Well Aware's **Twitter feed** provides inspiration for vulnerable wellness stories, ideas, and encouragement from our MCPS coworkers. You also will read tips on living a healthy life and receive updates on MCPS staff wellness programs.

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