

## December Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, a classroom teacher at Wilson Wims Elementary School who took big steps to improve her health during the fall *MCPS on the Move* challenge;
- a webinar in the form of a cooking demonstration during which our chefs will create a healthy winter meal while providing cooking and nutrition tips;
- holiday health and self-care;
- the WellBeats *Intro to Mindfulness* program;
- the DreamFIT Training and Wellness *Kickoff Challenge*; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

#### This month's free webinar— A Seasonal Cooking Demonstration

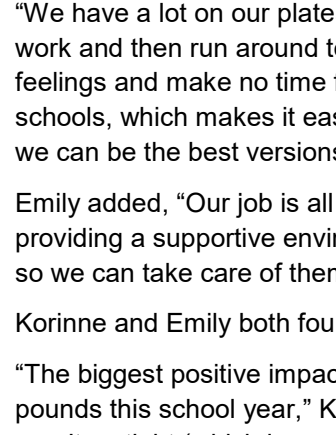
Are you looking for some healthy holiday recipes? Follow along with this seasonal cooking demonstration. Our chefs will create a healthy meal based on the winter season while providing an interactive demonstration with cooking and nutrition tips.

**Tuesday, December 17, 2024**  
 Webinar  
 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**.

## Wellness Champion Improves Her Health and Wellness by Participating in the MCPS on the Move Challenge



Front row from left: Dara Steichen, Korinne Panchura, Mariana Spitzberg, Jessica Steben.  
 Back row from left: Emily Hall, Katie Shapot.

Korinne Panchura, first grade teacher at Wilson Wims Elementary School, took big steps to improve her health during the fall *MCPS on the Move* challenge. She was inspired to join by teammate Emily Hall, media specialist. This fall, their team and school improved their health and wellness significantly.

Korinne joined the fall challenge to help reach a goal she had set for herself, to lose weight and be healthier in general.

"I had gained weight over the past year due to stress from work and life. Right before school started, I joined Weight Watchers and was successful tracking my food and losing weight," Korinne said. "When I read about the fall challenge, I thought adding exercise into the mix would be a great way to hold myself accountable."

Emily was excited for the camaraderie that the challenge would bring.

"I found that participating in this challenge helped me get to know other people in the building who I don't talk to on a regular basis," Emily said.

Emily and Korinne both believe that prioritizing their health is important as elementary school staff members.

"We have a lot on our plates at both work and at home," Korinne said. "So many of us leave work and then run around to a lot of activities with our families. It can be easy to eat your feelings and make no time for yourself. There are also a lot of treats that can be found in schools, which makes it easy to eat poorly. It's important to think about our health so that we can be the best versions of ourselves for our students, our families, and our friends."

Emily added, "Our job is all about the kids. We can't do our best job educating and providing a supportive environment if we feel unhealthy. We need to take care of ourselves so we can take care of them."

Korinne and Emily both found many positive outcomes from the fall challenge.

"The biggest positive impact that has come from my wellness journey is that I've lost 20 pounds this school year," Korinne said. "I feel better in my own skin because my clothes aren't so tight (which is more comfortable), which makes me feel more confident. I'm also in better shape than I was before. Sometimes, I would be winded from activities that shouldn't make me feel winded."

Encouragement from her team was one of the main benefits for Emily.

"Our teammates sent weekly emails to each other, reminding each other to log our workout," Emily said. "For me, having that accountability made me workout on those days I would rather sit on the couch watching TV."

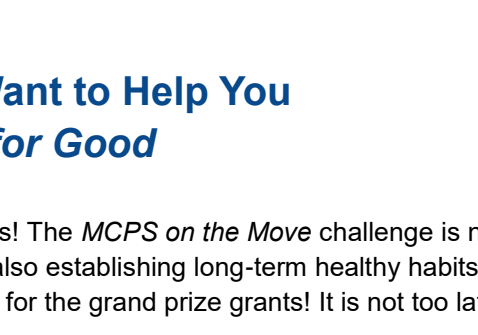
Korinne believes that motivation has to come from within.

"No one can force you into better health," Korinne said. You have to do it for yourself and it starts with a mind shift. It can be hard to go from eating your feelings to creating healthy eating habits. It also can be hard to make the time to move and exercise. I haven't done anything major, but sometimes I try to take three 20-minute walks a day. I don't have to carve out a lot of time to do that, and yet I've walked an hour more than I usually do. You have to do it for yourself, but it's great that MCPS has a program to help motivate you to start your health journey!"

Emily offers advice for those considering the upcoming spring challenge.

"It is so much easier than it seems," Emily said. "If you bookmark the website, all you have to do is log in (which is also saved) and log your movement. As one of our teammates mentioned, you don't have to log a running/walking exercise. There are so many different exercises to log, like barre, Pilates, yoga, Zumba, billiards, bowling, darts, mindfulness, gardening, or yardwork."

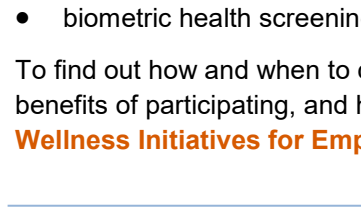
## MCPS on the Move 2024 Fall Winners



Nearly 5,000 Montgomery County Public Schools employees increased their physical activity during Well Aware's fall physical activity challenge: *MCPS on the Move*. They took part in a variety of physical activities to compete for prizes, and more importantly, to adopt or maintain healthy lifestyles. Each of the top 15 schools averaged at least 65 minutes of physical activity per employee per day.

See a [list of the MCPS on the Move grand prize winners](#) from the November 20<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Bulletin*.

## TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAM



## We Want to Help You Quit for Good

The fall physical activity challenge continues! The *MCPS on the Move* challenge is not only getting MCPS employees moving, but it is also establishing long-term healthy habits. There also is a lot of school and team competition for the grand prize grants! It is not too late to join us! [Learn more](#).

When *MCPS on the Move* ends, the challenge will continue! Well Aware is excited to announce the MCPS Well Aware *Head-to-Head Team Challenge*—a fun and engaging way to promote wellness and team spirit across our school district.

Starting on November 18, you will have the chance to compete head-to-head with other MCPS teams over four weeks. This is a great opportunity to get active, support your colleagues, and maybe even spark a little friendly competition. Interested? [Email Well Aware](#) for details.

## Wellness Initiatives Take the Wellness Initiative

If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your health insurance in 2026 and beyond 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 easy to complete. To earn the maximum two percent incentive toward your health insurance premiums, you need to complete a yearly—

- online health risk assessment, and
- biometric health screening (usually a physical with your primary care physician).

To find out how and when to complete your assessment and screening, more about the benefits of participating, and how your participation is reported to MCPS, please visit the [Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page](#).

## Stress Less During the Holidays

The holiday season is typically a happy, yet stressful time. 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 to meet your needs.

[Email Well Aware](#) to request the full schedule of classes.

## Join Us for Online Physical Activity

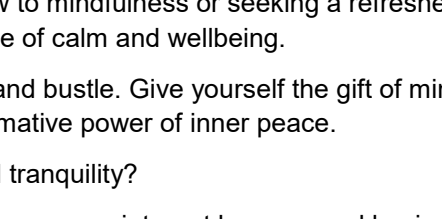
Physical activity or exercise can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing several diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Physical activity and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. Most importantly, regular activity can improve your heart, mind, and overall wellness. Consider trying one or the classes below to see what kind of physical activity is best for you!

From Zumba, HIITCamp, Stretch and Mobility, to core, Yoga, and toning classes, we offer many opportunity to meet your needs.

[Email Well Aware](#) to get the full schedule of classes. Register for the daily wellness email for class links and updates. [Opt-in to this email distribution list](#).

## Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

### Monthly Connection: Holiday Health and Self-Care



The *Employee Assistance Program (EAP)* and *Well Aware (the MCPS Employee Wellness Program)* continue to bring you monthly topics focusing on mental and physical health.

#### EAP Resources

The end of 2024 may include additional time with family or loved ones during winter break. This time of year can bring moments of joy and celebration, and new challenges or stressors. Consider the following resources from the EAP to support you in caring for yourself this month:

- Webinars from the EAP are recorded so you can watch at your convenience:
  - ◊ [Financial Caregiving: Know Your Options](#)—December 10, 2024 from 5:00–6:00 p.m.
  - ◊ [Meaningful Visits with a Loved One in Assisted Living or Memory Care \(request recording\)](#)
  - ◊ [Holiday Spending \(request recording\)](#)
  - ◊ [Building Your Resiliency Practice \(view recording\)](#)

The MCPS Dispute Resolution Program provides no-cost, confidential, and voluntary mediation to MCPS employees and their adult family members. In addition to work-related conflict, mediation is also available for family conflicts. Learn more on the [Mediation/Dispute Resolution web page](#).

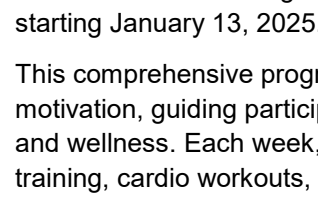
The MCPS EAP is here to support you. For questions or help with a specific problem or personal concern, please contact our EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.). You can also visit our [web page](#) for additional information.

#### Well Aware Resources

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

Try these tips for a healthy holiday season:

- [How to Have Healthier Holidays](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- [Healthy Holidays](#) from Nutrition.gov
- [Winter wellness: 7 tips for staying healthy during the holidays](#) from the Mayo Clinic



## Flights to Fitness to Return in January

Flights to Fitness (F2F) is a program designed to encourage physical activity among MCPS employees through stair climbing. Stay tuned for more information on the latest *Flights to Fitness* challenge starting in January!

## 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.

## 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](#) 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.

## Well Aware Toolbox

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, offers the Well Aware Wellness Toolbox, a web page with 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. 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!

## Join the Wellbeats Create Your Calm Program!

The holidays: A time for joy, celebration, and ... stress. Amidst the festive cheer, it's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of activities. But among the chaos, it's crucial to find moments of peace and tranquility.

As part of your employee benefits, you have access to the Wellbeats Wellness *Intro to Mindfulness* program, which offers a much-needed escape. These beginner friendly classes will guide you through simple mindfulness techniques that can be easily integrated into your daily life. Whether you're new to mindfulness or seeking a refresher, these sessions will help you cultivate a sense of calm and wellbeing.

Take a break from the holiday hustle and bustle. Give yourself the gift of mindfulness. Enroll today and discover the transformative power of inner peace.

Ready to end the year with peace and tranquility?

Access Wellbeats via the mobile app or on your internet browser and log in with your work email address. See attached [flyer](#) and [calendar](#).

## Have You Been to 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 with 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? Not to worry. Each livestreamed event is recorded and posted in a video library for you to access for at least 30 days. [Learn more](#).

All MCPS staff can participate! [Log in to participate](#) using password: mcpsmd.

## Head Heart and Hands 12-Week Wellness Program

The Head Heart and Hands 12-week wellness program is a comprehensive program of disease and 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. The program is designed to be inspiring and fun and to give participants the knowledge, tools, and support to lose weight permanently and reach their health goals. Our January group is registering! [Email Well Aware](#) for more information.

## Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Members

Don't forget to show yourself some love this holiday season with the gift of better health. With Omada, you are paired with a care team who can help make this your healthiest holiday yet without missing out on the holiday fun. Below are some quick tips you can start using right away.

Holiday Health Tips from an Omada health coach—

- Try an ingredient swap: Use Greek yogurt instead of sour cream, or pureed bananas instead of regular sugar.
- Go for a walk as a family or play a fun game indoors.
- Take a warm bath or do some deep breathing for 1-2 minutes.

You have access to Omada—a virtual health program that pairs you with a health coach plus smart devices and resources—at no cost to you if you are eligible.

Claim your benefit at [omadahealth](#). See [Omada's holiday flyer](#).

## MCPS Named a Healthiest Employer of Washington DC/Baltimore

Montgomery County Public Schools has been recognized in the 2024 Healthiest Employers of Washington DC/Baltimore, an awards program created to honor people-first organizations that prioritize the well-being of their employee population.

MCPS was recognized because of its commitment to workplace wellness and its exceptional health and benefits offerings. Award applicants were evaluated across six key categories: Culture and Leadership, Foundational Components, Strategic Planning, Communication and Marketing, Programming and Interventions, and Reporting and Analytics.

## Kickoff Challenge

Join DreamFIT Training and Wellness for an invigorating eight-week fitness challenge starting January 13, 2025.

This comprehensive program is designed to kickstart your new year with energy and motivation, guiding participants through a transformative journey toward improved health and wellness. Each week, you'll engage in three workouts that will include a mix of strength training, cardio workouts, and flexibility exercises, tailored for all fitness levels

Stephanie, owner of DreamFIT Training and Wellness, will provide personalized coaching, nutrition tips, and weekly check-ins to track your progress and keep you accountable. You'll also have the opportunity to connect with a supportive community of fellow MCPS challengers, sharing successes and overcoming obstacles together. No matter your goal, this challenge is the perfect way to set the tone for a successful year ahead. Don't miss out—sign up today and take the first step toward achieving your fitness goals in 2025. [Register here](#).

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 240-740-8100 or [email Well Aware](#).