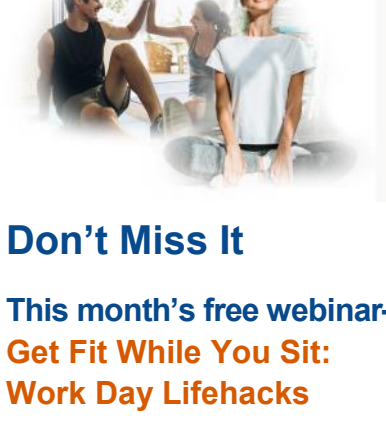


April Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champions, members of the top 10k-a-Day team who emboldened one another to set and reach their daily goals as they worked to complete the challenge;
- a webinar on designing your work day with effective health hacks;
- National Walking Day;
- National Cancer Control Month;
- a cooking demonstration series;
- Move More Month; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—
Get Fit While You Sit:
Work Day Lifehacks**

Is your work day designed to set you up for wellness success? In this webinar, learn highly effective stretching, ergonomic, and even food/drink tips that will help you reach your wellness goals.

**Thursday, April 27, 2023
4:30 p.m.**

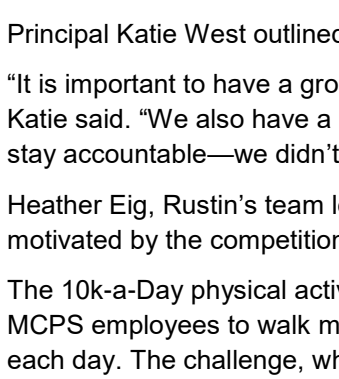
Please **email Well Aware** to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a link to the webinar in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

Spread the word with our **printable flyer**. Visit the **Wellness Webinar Library**.

Presented by: Kaiser Permanente

Wellness Champions Are Top Team in 10k-a-Day Challenge

Team Red Foxes, Bayard Rustin Elementary School



From left: Heather Eig, Steve Lightman, Heather Karakashian, Kathryn West, Mary Cohen, and Hallie Goldenhorn

Bayard Rustin Elementary School's team *Red Foxes* completed the Well Aware 10k-a-Day step challenge as the top team. The six team members emboldened one another to set and reach daily goals as they worked to complete the challenge. They are: Mary O. Cohen, classroom teacher; Heather M. Eig, counselor; Hallie J. Goldenhorn, special education teacher; Heather K. Karakashian, classroom teacher; Steven A. Lightman, physical education teacher; and Kathryn (Katie) C. West, principal.

Principal Katie West outlined a few reasons the team came together for the challenge.

"It is important to have a group to motivate each other on sluggish days—it makes it fun," Katie said. "We also have a great team leader who reminded us to log [our activity] and stay accountable—we didn't want to let her down!"

Heather Eig, Rustin's team leader, had this to say about the challenge, "I was very motivated by the competition. It was a great way to jump start our activity for the year."

The 10k-a-Day physical activity campaign, sponsored by Kaiser Permanente, challenged MCPS employees to walk more, with a goal of accumulating the equivalent of 10,000 steps each day. The challenge, which ran for a month beginning in mid-February, enabled staff to use mobile apps to record their exercise minutes and convert them to steps.

The team realized a number of positive outcomes by participating in the 10k-a-Day challenge.

"We stayed accountable and reached goals while supporting each other," Katie said. "This created a great camaraderie in our school! We also were more mindful about moving throughout the day to reach our goals."

Bayard Rustin Elementary School has other staff wellness programs to support its employees.

"We have a Water Club to encourage staying hydrated," Katie said. "We also have a virtual calming room on our website that offers links to mindfulness apps, guided imagery, meditation videos, and calming music."

In addition, the school has a staff exercise space in the gym, with free weights, as well as an elliptical machine. Occasional staff yoga and mindfulness opportunities are held during professional development.

The *Red Foxes* team even created wellness activities for the school community.

"We hold a Family Wellness Night for the community," Katie said. "We have Fit Friday family workouts once a month to invite families to work out with us."

Heather noted that they used their grant money from previous challenges to purchase a water cooler, yoga mats, and weights for the staff.

Team *Red Foxes* has some suggestions for schools considering staff wellness programs.

"Recognize that wellness is a critical piece of health and therefore influences productivity on the job," Katie said. "Staff members who are mentally and physically well are better able to manage the inevitable stress in our profession. A wellness program also helps to build your village because it's always more fun doing the work with people you care about."

Cooking Demonstration Series

Join Well Aware and Cigna for some virtual cooking demonstrations to learn tips and tricks for healthy eating. To register for one or all of the cooking demonstrations, **email Well Aware**.

Healthy Recipes in 15 minutes or less—During this cooking demonstration, we will make three balanced meals in one hour, designed by Cigna's dietician and professional chef. These recipes are great for meal preparation, so you can eat healthy all week long.

**Wednesday April 12, 2023
7:00 p.m.**

Simply Healthy Snacks and Pantry Makeover—Healthy snacks are a great way to fuel your body and mind throughout the day. Learn to whip up these snacks in no time. We also will help you look at your pantry a little differently, organizing it in a way that promotes a healthy and fit lifestyle.

**Wednesday April 19, 2023
7:00 p.m.**

Have You Taken the Wellness Initiatives for 2024?

The Wellness Initiatives program provides employees covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan with incentives to reduce their health insurance costs. Be sure to take advantage of the rate reductions by following these steps:

1. Complete a biometric health screening by October 6, 2023—See your doctor for an annual physical, attend one of Well Aware's **on-site biometric health screenings**, or, if you are a Cigna member, have your physical at a Quest Patient Services Center.
2. Complete a health risk assessment on your medical plan's website by October 6, 2023.

Kaiser Permanente members: You will need to sign a HIPAA waiver. A link to the waiver is available on the **Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page**. Be sure to log in to confirm your participation in the Wellness Initiatives program. Without your consent, your information will not be reported.

Spring Forward Challenge Update

We are a little over two weeks into the MCPS *Spring Forward* physical activity challenge, and our MCPS coworkers are working hard! We have already awarded 10 individual grants to school/office/depot participants for logging their activity. We seem to have the spring back in our steps!

It is not too late to *Spring Forward*. Register for a **Well Aware Fitness Log** account and start logging your activity. **See all of the *Spring Forward* challenge details.**

April Is National Cancer Control Month

This year, an estimated half a million Americans will lose their lives to cancer, and three times that many will be diagnosed with this devastating illness. Cancer patients are parents and grandparents, children and cherished friends; the disease touches almost all of us and casts a shadow over families and communities across our nation.

During National Cancer Control Month this April, we remember those we have lost, support Americans fighting this disease, and recommit ourselves to effective cancer control.

Prevention and screening are our best defenses against cancer. All Americans can reduce their risk by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, limiting sun exposure, avoiding excessive alcohol consumption, living tobacco-free, and taking advantage of appropriate regularly scheduled cancer screenings. **Learn more about screening for many types of cancers.**

American Heart Association: April Is Move More Month

Every April, the American Heart Association celebrates physical activity and encourages all Americans to commit to being more active on a regular basis. The American Heart Association encourages you to Move More Together with these **Five-Minute Movement Breaks!**

Are you fitting in at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of heart-pumping physical activity per week? If not, you're not alone. Only about one in five adults and teens get enough exercise to maintain good health. Being more active can help all people think, feel and sleep better and perform daily tasks more easily. And if you're sedentary, sitting less is a great place to start.

These recommendations are based on the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. They recommend how much physical activity we need to be healthy. The guidelines are based on current scientific evidence supporting the connections between physical activity, overall health and well-being, disease prevention and quality of life.

Adults should be getting at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity, or a combination of both, preferably spread throughout the week.

Children 3-5 years old should be physically active and have plenty of opportunities to move throughout the day. Kids 6-17 years old should get at least 60 minutes per day of moderate - to vigorous-intensity physical activity, mostly aerobic.

If you are getting starting remember that any amount of movement is better than none. Start by taking a two-minute walk and add to it.

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 U.S. get enough aerobic exercise to improve their health. That 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 .**

National Get Fit, Don't Sit Day: Wednesday, May 3, 2023

The first Wednesday in May is *Get Fit, Don't Sit Day*. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) sponsors this day to increase awareness of the dangers of excessive sitting, and the importance of getting up and moving throughout the day—especially at work.

Research shows that sitting for long periods of time increases the risk of health complications. The ADA recommends breaking up sitting time with three or more minutes of light physical activity, such as walking, leg extensions, or overhead arm stretches every 30 minutes.

Here are some great resources with ideas to get you moving:

- **More information on why sitting is bad for our health**
- **Desk exercises**

Stress Less this Spring

Fresh air and exercise can help you to manage stress. In addition, being in the outdoors and nature can improve mental wellbeing. Spring is a wonderful time to get outside and enjoy nature. **Check out this article to learn more information on how nature helps mental health.**

In addition to spending more time in nature, Well Aware is continuing our online virtual live and recorded classes for your convenience. From yoga and seated yoga, to mindfulness and tai chi, 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 receive this email distribution list.**

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!

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 receive this 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 running 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.

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.

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!

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**.