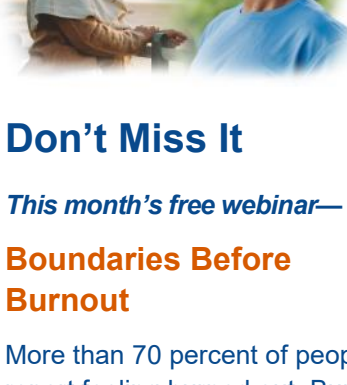


## December Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, a volunteer wellness coach who supports her coworkers by encouraging them to stay healthy through fun and creative activities;
- a webinar on the importance of setting boundaries to avoid and recover from burnout;
- Well Aware and EAP Connection's resources for self-care during the holidays;
- this year's Sweet-free Zone;
- Wellbeats *Create Your Calm* program;
- the *Head, Heart, and Hand* program; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

*This month's free webinar—*

#### Boundaries Before Burnout

More than 70 percent of people report feeling burned out. Burnout is impacting their work, mood, and personal relationships. Learn why setting boundaries is one of the most important self-care strategies you can implement in your life and how to add them to your daily life right away.

**Wednesday, December 14, 2023**  
4:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.

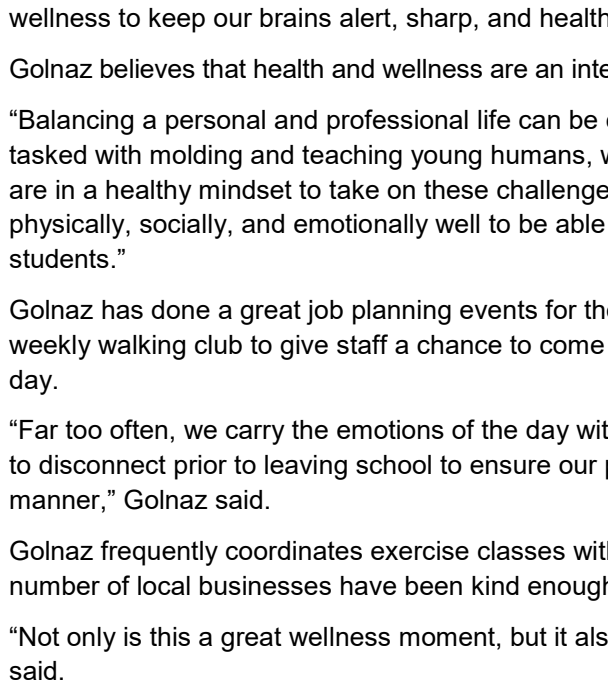
Please **email Well Aware** to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a link to the webinar in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

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

*Presented by: Kaiser Permanente*

## Wellness Champion: Teacher Encourages Coworkers to Maintain a Healthy Mental and Physical Lifestyle

**Ms. Golnaz Ziaee, Grade 1 Teacher, Bethesda Elementary School**



Golnaz Ziaee, front, with coworkers

Ms. Golnaz Ziaee, first grade teacher at Bethesda Elementary School, has made it a priority to encourage her coworkers to live healthy lives. Her goal is to help keep the staff at her school in good shape mentally and physically. She doesn't stop there; she also works hard to improve staff morale and encourage their participation in health and wellness awareness events.

These also are personal priorities to Golnaz.

"Health and wellness are an integral part of functioning in today's culture," Golnaz said. "As humans, we encounter various types of stressors, and it is important to make sure our bodies and brains are in sync to ensure we are able to combat whatever the day throws at us. In the same way we work out to ensure we are fit, we must pay attention to mental wellness to keep our brains alert, sharp, and healthy."

Golnaz believes that health and wellness are an integral part of being a school staff member.

"Balancing a personal and professional life can be challenging," Golnaz said. "As we are tasked with molding and teaching young humans, we must ensure that we as individuals are in a healthy mindset to take on these challenges. As educators, we must ensure we are physically, socially, and emotionally well to be able to positively manage and impact our students."

Golnaz has done a great job planning events for the staff at the school. She started a weekly walking club to give staff a chance to come together to decompress after the school day.

"Far too often, we carry the emotions of the day with us home, so it is a wellness tool to try to disconnect prior to leaving school to ensure our personal time is spent in a positive manner," Golnaz said.

Golnaz frequently coordinates exercise classes with various clubs and gyms in the area. A number of local businesses have been kind enough to offer free and/or discounted lessons.

"Not only is this a great wellness moment, but it also incorporates team building," Golnaz said.

She does other things to encourage team building and physical activity. She shares flyers with school staff that list tips on mental and physical wellness. She also holds stretch breaks with colleagues during lunch breaks and teaches them about the importance of breathing exercises.

"There are moments when we get overwhelmed or stressed as educators, but taking a deep breath is very helpful in overcoming the moment and proceeding with your day," Golnaz said.

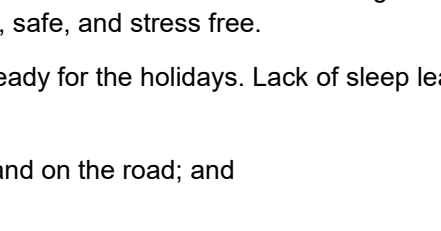
She also has arranged to have food trucks come to the school, held ice breakers at staff meetings, and promoted wearing pink for breast cancer awareness month.

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

"I would say, just do it," Golnaz said. "No matter how small the group is, no matter how small your audience is, just do it. It is always difficult to find time and to find team members who can give up time from their personal lives, but once they get started the rewards make it all worth it."

## Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

### Monthly Connection: Holiday Health and Self Care



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](#).

#### Well Aware Resources

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

- Don't skimp on sleep as you get ready for the holidays. Lack of sleep leads to—
  - overeating and weight gain;
  - safety issues at home, work, and on the road; and
  - a negative mood.
- Keep 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.
- Get the flu vaccine.

Try [these tips](#) for a healthy holiday season.

#### EAP Resources

The end of the year can both be filled with moments of joy and additional stressors. Inflation and the higher cost of items, including gifts, can be a financial challenge at this time of year. In addition, some may experience heightened feelings of grief while missing loved ones during the holidays. With the end of daylight savings time last month, many are leaving work with little daylight remaining. The shorter days, combined with colder weather as winter nears, can have a negative impact on mood and well-being. The following resources can help you navigate some of these challenges this month. Remember, the EAP also is here to help.

- Caregiver Support Group Webinar on Exploring Legacy & Rituals for the Bereaved at the Holidays ([request recording](#))
- Holiday Spending Financial Webinar ([request recording](#))
- [Helpful Holiday Support Resources](#)
- [Seasonal Affective Disorder \(SAD\): More Than the Winter Blues](#)

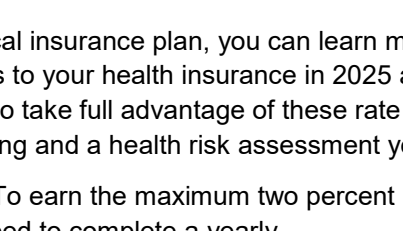
## Join Us for the Health for the Holidays Challenge!

Join Well Aware this month for a four-week challenge: *Health for the Holidays*. What would be more fun than whimsical winter scenes coming to life in a wellness challenge as a way to experience progress toward better health? Paint magical winter scenes around the world revealing each location by recording healthy activities like moving more, choosing healthy foods, and showing gratitude. The challenge begins on December 4, 2023, and ends on December 31, 2023. [Learn more](#).

## It's Time to Quit for Good

### TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAM

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."

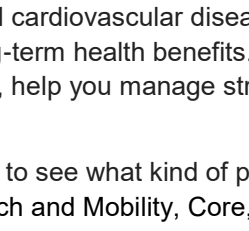


It's hard to quit smoking, but you can do it. To have the best chance of quitting and remaining a nonsmoker, you need to know what you're up against, what your options are, and where to go for help. We can help!

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 18, 2024. [Learn more](#).

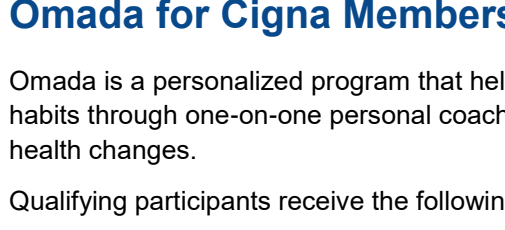
## Enter the Sweet-free Zone!

This year, Well Aware is challenging you to designate your school or office as a sweet-free zone. What does this mean? It means that you pledge to do your best to celebrate the holidays in a healthy way.



During the holidays, print and post [this flyer](#) on the staff lounge or break room door to designate the area as a sweet-free zone. Be sure to read the suggestions in the flyer for changing the culture in your school or office.

Are you doing something special to stop the influx of sweets and treats in your work location? [Let us know](#), and please send pictures!



## Nearly 5,000 MCPS Employees Upped Their Game During MCPS on the Move

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 76 minutes of physical activity per employee per day.

See a [list of the MCPS on the Move grand prize winners](#) from the November 15<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Bulletin*.

## Head, Heart, and Hand 12-Week Wellness Program

The Head, Heart, and Hand 12-week wellness program is a comprehensive program of learning 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.

## 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 2025 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. Living through the COVID-19 pandemic has made the season that much more challenging for many of us.

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 will meet your needs. [Email Well Aware](#) to request a monthly schedule of classes.

## Join Us for Online Physical Activity Classes

Physical activities 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 HIITCamp, to Stretch and Mobility, Core, Yoga, and toning classes, there is truly something for everyone!

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



## 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!

## Omada for Cigna Members

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create healthier habits through 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](https://omadahealth.com/mcps). Be sure to view this [two-minute video](#).

## Join Wellbeats' Create Your Calm Program

It is the most wonderful—and busiest—time of the year! Amidst the hustle and bustle, it's important to make time for yourself during the holiday season.

To find more inner peace, we invite you to join the 14-day *Create Your Calm* program on Wellbeats Wellness, a product of LifeSpeak Inc. This program will guide you through daily breathing exercises, meditations, and mindfulness practices to take care of your mental health. By the end of the program, you will become more aware of how to create moments of calm during stressful times. See the [Create Your Calm flyer](#) and [program calendar](#). Join *Create Your Calm* on the Wellbeats Wellness app or visit [portal.wellbeats.com](https://portal.wellbeats.com).

New to Wellbeats? Wellbeats offers 24/7 virtual fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes. These classes can be streamed on your personal devices at home, school, or on the go. You can schedule classes in advance and invite your coworkers to join you; or you can download classes to play when you are offline. See [this flyer](#) for log-in information, enjoy this [welcome video](#), and this video announcing that [Wellbeing is for All](#).

## 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.

## Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employee 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](https://twitter.com/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!](#)

## 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.

## MCPS Named Healthiest Employer of Washington DC/Baltimore

Montgomery County Public Schools has been recognized in the 2023 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.

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](#).