

## February Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the February 2025 issue of *Well Aware eNews*! Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champions, two high school teachers who, along with their wellness team, are all smiles after participating in *MCPS on the Move*;
- a webinar on stroke, its warning signs, symptoms, and ways to minimize permanent damage;
- this year's National Wear Red Day;
- Well Aware/EAP Connection: Heart Health Month;
- online tools from your medical plan; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—  
Heart Health: Stroke Smarts**

Do you know what to do if someone is having a stroke? Learn stroke warning signs and symptoms and what you can do to minimize—and even prevent—permanent damage and save a life. We also will discuss overall heart health and preventative measures you can take.

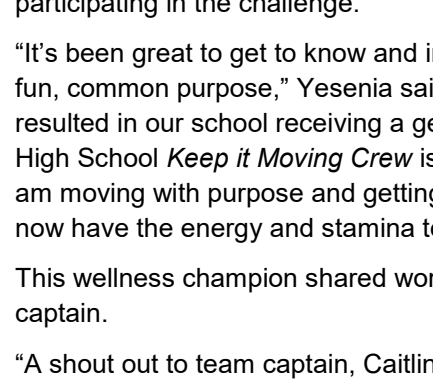
**Wednesday February 26, 2025**  
Webinar/Recording  
4:30–5:30 p.m.

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 Champions Are All Smiles After *MCPS on the Move* Challenge Participation

**Yesenia Diaz, teacher and Caitlin LaRue, teacher, Clarksburg High School**



Clarksburg High School MCPS on the Move Team

Yesenia Diaz and Caitlin LaRue, teachers at Clarksburg High School, discovered the extent to which a team can keep health and wellness inspiration and motivation high. Caitlin encouraged Yesenia to join the *MCPS on the Move* physical activity challenge this fall. That simple invitation has made a world of difference.

"I decided to participate in the fitness challenge for friendly competition, comradery, and self-care," Yesenia said. "I teach in a portable classroom, so my laps around the hallways at Clarksburg High School (CHS) have become less frequent as compared to last year."

Yesenia believes that health and wellness are very important for high school staff.

"Health and wellness are paramount to high school staff because of our daily interactions with students, staff, and the community," Yesenia said. "It's been said that 'you can't pour from an empty cup.' As a teacher, you're responsible for the education of approximately 140 students, liaise with colleagues and community members on various efforts, and have a life outside of work. It is vital to take care of yourself; that is, to be properly nourished, well hydrated, physically active, and rested."

Yesenia has seen many positive outcomes from having accepted Caitlin's invitation and participating in the challenge.

"It's been great to get to know and interact with colleagues outside of my department for a fun, common purpose," Yesenia said. "Participation in the MCPS Well Aware challenge has resulted in our school receiving a generous grant to promote staff wellness. The Clarksburg High School *Keep it Moving Crew* is looking forward to organizing an activity this spring. I am moving with purpose and getting my steps in, which I may not have otherwise done. I now have the energy and stamina to help my students stay on task through dismissal!"

This wellness champion shared words of appreciation for the *Keep it Moving Crew* team captain.

"A shout out to team captain, Caitlin LaRue, who invited staff to join the Clarksburg High School *Keep it Moving Crew* at the beginning of the semester, Yesenia said. "Last year, I was a floater who shared Caitlin's classroom. I had missed our daily, comical exchanges. As you can see from our group photo, we are all smiles when we're together!"

Yesenia has advice for those considering participating in an upcoming Well Aware challenge.

"These physical activity challenges are for our own good," Yesenia said. "We must devote time to take care of ourselves. Thirty minutes a day makes a difference. Take the initiative and get a group going. It's well worth it and trust me, 'if you build it, they will come.'"

## Today Is the American Heart Association's National Wear Red Day

The American Heart Association (AHA) is holding its yearly National Wear Red Day on Friday, February 7, 2025, to call attention to heart disease. Why "Go Red?" According to AHA, "Heart disease and stroke cause one in three deaths among women each year, killing approximately one woman every 80 seconds. Fortunately, we have the power to change that because 80 percent of cardiac and stroke events may be prevented with education and action.

Well Aware encourages all Montgomery County Public Schools employees to make their heart health a priority. Schedule your annual preventive check-up to review your overall health, measure your blood pressure, check your cholesterol, and look for signs of heart disease, stroke, and other illnesses.

Do your part to educate yourself, your friends, and your family this year. Join the movement to end heart disease and strokes in women because it's not just a man's disease. Here is what it means to "Go Red":

G: Get Your Numbers  
O: Own Your Lifestyle

R: Realize Your Risk  
E: Educate Your Family  
D: Don't Be Silent

Watch this [video](#) that explains why you should Go Red.

Did your school, office, or depot plan a Wear Red Day in honor of women's heart health? Take a picture of your staff and [email it to Well Aware](#).

## Medical Plan Online Tools

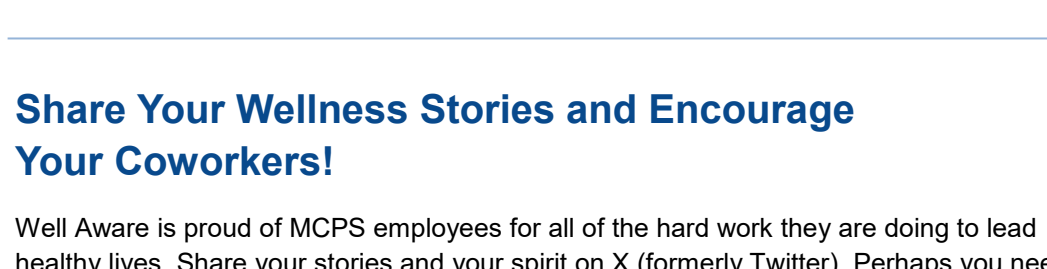
Both Kaiser Permanente and Cigna offer many online tools and resources to help you on your health and wellness journey. These programs are included in your monthly premium cost, so make sure to take advantage of what is available to you!

**Cigna tools**

- Coaching
- Apps
- Cigna Healthy Rewards

**Kaiser Permanente tools**

- Coaching
- Apps (English/Spanish)
- Healthy Resources



## Flights to Fitness: World Landmarks

Stair climbing can be a wonderful way to keep fit. Most of us live and/or work in or near a building with stairs. Stair climbing can be done anytime throughout the day as a break in your routine. The activity benefits your heart and mind, as well as your leg muscles.

Well Aware is challenging you to climb famous world landmarks, or climb the equivalent of these landmarks in flights of stairs. Form a team and complete these landmarks together to share your sense of achievement! It is a great way to stay in shape during the cold winter months.

For details, visit Well Aware's [Flights to Fitness web page](#).

## Stress Less This Winter

Shorter days with less sunlight combined with cold weather lead to a more sedentary lifestyle. This can make a big difference in your mood and stress levels.

Effective stress management, on the other hand, helps you break the hold that 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.

## Take the Wellness Initiatives

### Reduce Your Share of Health Insurance Costs for 2026

If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan through Cigna or Kaiser Permanente, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your 2026 health insurance 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 very simple to accomplish. To receive the maximum 2 percent reduction on your health insurance premiums in 2026, you have until October 3, 2025, to complete—

- an online health risk assessment, and
- a biometric health screening.

To find out how to complete your biometric health screening and health risk assessment, more about the benefits of participating, and how your results will be reported to MCPS, please visit the [Wellness Initiatives web page](#).

## 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, HITCamp, Stretch and Mobility, to core, Yoga, and toning classes, we offer many classes to meet your needs.

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

## Wellbeats Wellness: Give Your Heart Some Love

Have you ever wondered how a few small changes can make a big difference in your heart health? For Heart Health Month, we're sharing ways you can take charge of your well-being for a healthier, happier heart.

As part of your benefits, you have access to the Wellbeats Wellness where you can find many videos that are geared towards getting and keeping you and your heart in tiptop shape. We have broken down the types of content you can find in Wellbeats three pillars: Fitness, Nutrition, and Mind-Body.

Ready to show your heart some love? Access Wellbeats via the mobile app or on your internet browser and log in with your work email address. Check out the attached [flyer](#) for login instructions. See this [flyer](#) for details.

## 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.

## 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.

## Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Members

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create healthier habits by offering 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](#).

## 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](#) using password: mcpsmd.

## Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

### Heart Health Month



*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.*

Poor heart health can significantly impact mental health by causing anxiety, depression, and stress due to the fear of future heart events. Likewise, mental health conditions such as chronic stress and depression can also negatively affect heart health by increasing blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and the risk of heart disease. Essentially, the mind and heart are interconnected, with issues in one area often impacting the other.

**EAP Resources:**

Managing stress is important to support a healthy heart. Effective stress management includes strategies to relieve stress in-the-moment and proactive activities to take a break from stressors.

Try these in-the-moment strategies from [mondaycampaigns.org](#):

- Intentional breathing exercises like [Box Breathing](#) or [Breathing with the 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique](#)

Along with eating nutrient dense foods and staying active, laughter can also help relieve stress. Laughter has many benefits, as the popular quote "laughter is the best medicine" states. Have you heard of Laughter Yoga? Laughter yoga is an exercise program fusing the exercise of laughter with the breathing techniques of yoga, and can be even more beneficial than natural laughter. [Learn more](#) about laughter yoga and try a class with [Laughter Yoga International](#).

If you are feeling overwhelmed with life's stressors, the MCPS EAP is here to help. Please contact the EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.) to learn more and schedule an appointment. You can also visit our [web page](#) on the MCPS website for additional information and resources.

**Well Aware Resources**

During American Heart Month, the American Heart Association and other organizations reinforce the importance of heart health, including the need for more research and efforts to ensure that millions of people live longer and healthier.

In most cases, heart disease is preventable when people adopt a healthy lifestyle, which includes not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, controlling blood sugar and cholesterol, treating high blood pressure, getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week, and getting regular checkups.

- [Heart Attack and Stroke Symptoms](#)
- [Learn more about living a healthy lifestyle](#)
- [Learn more about healthy eating](#)
- [Learn how fitness positively impacts your heart](#)

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](#).