

May Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, an elementary school wellness trainer whose dedication led to more teams at her school participating in January's *Head-to-Head Team Challenge* than at any other MCPS school;
- a cooking demonstration/webinar to show you how to prepare a delicious vegetarian meal complete with all the essential nutrients needed for optimal health;
- Bike to Work Day;
- Well Aware's virtual celebration of Teacher Appreciation Week;
- the American Diabetes Association's *National Get Fit Don't Sit Day*; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—
The Vegetarian Way**

Adopting a vegetarian diet presents a variety of advantages, both for individual health and the environment. However, it is essential to carefully consider your dietary selections to guarantee that you obtain all the essential nutrients needed for optimal health. This cooking demonstration is designed to inform you about the principles of preparing a vegetarian meal that not only delights your palate but also delivers the comprehensive nutrition necessary for your body to flourish.

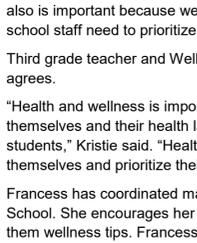
Wednesday, May 28, 2025
Cooking Demonstration/Webinar
4:30–5:30 p.m.

Please register for the webinar by emailing [Well Aware](#). You will receive a link in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

Spread the word with our [printable flyer](#). Visit the [Wellness Webinar](#)

Wellness Champion Considered an “Essential Part of the School Community”

**Frances M. Rivas, wellness trainer,
Watkins Mill Elementary School**



From left: Kristie Fogel, third grade teacher, and Frances Rivas, wellness trainer, Watkins Mill Elementary School

Frances Rivas, wellness trainer at Watkins Mill Elementary School, is committed to promoting staff wellness at her school. Her dedication led to more teams at her school participating in January's *Head-to-Head Team Challenge* than at any other MCPS school.

“Since I was a little kid, my mom always taught me how to eat healthy,” Frances said. “Health and wellness have always been a big part of my life. I always try to take care of my well-being. I remember running as a kid to keep not just my body, but also my mental health, safe.”

Frances has been running since she was 10 years old. She runs marathons and coaches for Girls on the Run.

“I want to pass all of my knowledge along to my family, students, and colleagues,” Frances said. “Thanks to my position as wellness trainer at my school, I have the opportunity to do so many fun and healthy activities with them.”

Frances fully understands the importance of health and wellness to elementary school staff.

“If we, as adults, are not taking care of our well-being, how are we going to support and be ready to teach and help our students?” Frances said. “We are the example for our students. If they see a happy teacher, someone who talks to them about taking care of themselves and shares outdoor activities with them, they will follow the example. Wellness also is important because we work long hours, and our work can be demanding. That's why school staff need to prioritize their own health and mental well-being.”

Third grade teacher and Well Aware physical activity challenge participant Kristie Fogel agrees.

“Health and wellness is important because many elementary school staff members put themselves and their health last in order to meet the needs of their loved ones and their students,” Kristie said. “Health and wellness efforts encourage staff to take time for themselves and prioritize their well-being.”

Frances has coordinated many wellness programs for staff at Watkins Mill Elementary School. She encourages her coworkers to walk before or after school and regularly sends them wellness tips. Frances and other Watkins Mill Elementary School staff are participating in the *Summit Seeker* challenge. She coordinated their participation in the *Head-to-Head* challenge, previously worked with her colleagues to hold their own challenge at “The Mill,” and held a walking Wednesday early last month. She has several other activities planned for when staff return from Spring Break.

“Everyone pushes each other to do their best,” Frances said. “The challenges are not just competition for us; we want to keep ourselves in the best health possible. I really appreciate all the work my coworkers do! It's important to pamper ourselves.”

Frances has seen many positive outcomes from the wellness programs.

“We've developed friendships by supporting each other,” Frances said. “Staff are engaged and tell me they appreciate the tips I provide and agree to do what I recommend. They also share tips with each other. I want to show my colleagues that even though we are busy, it is essential to take care of our health and wellness. We need to be healthy for our families as well.”

Kristie recognizes Frances for her commitment to health and wellness at the school.

“Frances is more than just a coach,” Kristie said. “Yes, she encourages us to stay healthy and prioritize our own health. However, she also is an essential part of the school community. My students beg to see her. Additionally, she plans activities and experiences that are engaging and promotes wellness skills. She is also a role model for students, as she is a runner and is involved in wellness events and clubs at school.”

Frances has suggestions for schools looking to start a staff wellness program.

“You do not need to hold big events,” Frances said. “You can start with something small like a before-school mindful walk. Create a competition between colleagues, you will take care of yourself, but also your teammates. Take advantage of the programs and resources that MCPS Well Aware offers. With just 10 minutes of daily walking or even reading a book, we can make a difference.”

Wellness Initiatives: Complete Your Health Risk Assessment to Save on Your Health Insurance

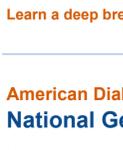
Completing your health risk assessment each year gives you the information you need to take better control of your health and well-being. And that's important because when you are running at 100 percent, being fit and in good spirits will go a long way to help you perform at your best.

Take your medical insurance plan's confidential, online questionnaire and in less than 20 minutes, you will—

- learn your risk levels for common health problems, including heart disease, colon cancer, and diabetes;
- get a clear picture of your current health status and learn how to improve your health in the future through preventive tests, chronic condition support, and online health coaching; and
- discover interactive tools and educational information that can give you more details on your health status.

Managing and improving your health has never been easier. And, when you complete your Health Risk Assessment by October 3, 2025, MCPS will pay 1 percent more of the total cost of your 2026 health insurance premiums—reducing your contribution by 1 percent. To get started, visit the [Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page](#). You will find links to access the Instra and Kaiser Permanente Health Risk Assessments. You will also find helpful instructions to guide you through the log-in process.

Learn more about reducing your health insurance costs in 2026 and beyond through the Wellness Initiatives program.



Did You Reach the Summit?

Across Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), employees are experiencing better health and morale because of their involvement in the Well Aware *Summit Seeker* physical activity challenge. Some are participating as individuals; others participate as members of a team. They are enjoying better health and fitness as a result.

The challenge ends on Sunday, May 11. You must enter your activity in the online [Well Aware Fitness Log](#) by noon on Monday, May 12, 2025. Visit the [Summit Seeker web page](#) for details.

Grand prize winners will be announced in the May 21st issue of *The Bulletin*.

Don't Stop Now!

Maintain your active lifestyle and look for information about our fall wellness programs on the [Well Aware web page](#), in the [Well Aware eNews](#), on X (formerly known as Twitter) [@mcpswellaware](#), and in [The Bulletin](#).

May Is National High Blood Pressure Education Month

Uncontrolled high blood pressure, or hypertension, is dangerous and far too common. In fact, one in every three adults in the United States has the condition. High blood pressure usually has no signs or symptoms, but it does have consequences. Knowing your numbers if the only way to know if you are at risk for high blood pressure.

During National High Blood Pressure Education Month, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) challenges Americans to control or lower their high blood pressure. Your doctor may recommend adopting heart-healthy lifestyle changes, such as heart-healthy eating patterns like the [DASH eating plan](#), alone or with medicines. Controlling or lowering blood pressure can also help prevent or delay high blood pressure complications, such as chronic kidney disease, heart attack, heart failure, stroke, and possibly vascular dementia.

High blood pressure control is a journey. You can take small steps every day to control high blood pressure and protect your heart. [Read about ways to manage high blood pressure](#).

Uncontrolled high blood pressure is dangerous and far too common. Talk with your health-care team about a management plan. Here are [questions to ask during your visit](#).

Also, be sure to schedule a [Well Aware health screening](#) to find out your blood pressure. You also will get credit for completing your biometric health screening for 2026 if an MCPS-provided medical plan covers you.

Learn a deep breathing technique to help control your blood pressure any time.

American Diabetes Association National Get Fit Don't Sit Day

Held the first Wednesday of May each year, National Get Fit Don't Sit Day is an opportunity for the American Diabetes Association (ADA) 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.

Learn the [risks of sitting too much](#). Find out how you can [increase your NEAT!](#)

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 well-being. Spring is a wonderful time to get outside and enjoy nature. Check out [this article](#) to learn more about how nature improves mental health.

In addition to spending more time in nature, Well Aware is continuing our online, live, in-person, and recorded classes for your convenience. There is something for everyone, from yoga and seated yoga, to mindfulness and tai chi. Give them all a try to see what you like best.

Email Well Aware for more information.

Join Us for Online Physical Activity

Physical activity or exercise can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing 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 of the classes below to see what kind of physical activity is best for you!

From Zumba and HITCamp, to Stretch and Mobility, Core, Yoga, and toning classes, we offer many classes to meet your needs.

Email Well Aware to request the monthly calendar of classes.

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, 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!

Well Aware to Celebrate Teachers During Teacher Appreciation Week

Please join Well Aware for its virtual celebration of teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week! Join in virtual appreciation classes that will provide a space for connection, relaxation, and creativity. [Learn more](#).

Have You Accessed HFP Live?

MCPS Well Aware and Cigna have partnered to provide all MCPS staff 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 upcoming events you can check out. You can access the livestream portal and view the upcoming events schedule from any computer, laptop, tablet, or cell phone 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](#). [Log in to participate](#) using password: mcpsmd.

Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Members

Step into a healthier future with small steps that make a big impact. Your health isn't just about today—it's about every moment you share with a those who rely on you. Omada provides tools, expert guidance, and a dedicated care team to help you feel your best and live life on your terms.

Whether it's nutrition, movement, or building new habits, we're here to make the process simple and achievable.

With Omada, you will receive the following:

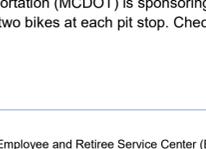
- Personalized support from a certified health coach, and for specific programs like diabetes and hypertension, as well as access to a clinical specialist.
- A customer care plan that improves eating habits without cutting out your favorite meals or counting every calorie.
- A welcome kit with connected smart devices to monitor your progress—yours to keep at no additional cost (if eligible).

More than 60 million women in the U.S. live with some form of heart disease. Make your health a priority and take small steps toward long-term well-being. Claim your benefit today at [www.omadahealth.com/mcps](#) at no cost to you (if eligible).

See this [flyer](#) from Omada.

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

Monthly Connection: Mental Health Awareness Month & Women's Health Awareness



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.

In May, we recognize both Mental Health Awareness Month and Women's Health Awareness Month.

EAP Resources

According to the Office of Women's Health (OWH), one in five women have experienced a mental health condition in the past year. (Some mental health conditions are unique to women. In particular, women can experience certain types of depression and anxiety during the menstrual cycle leading up to menstruation, during pregnancy, post-loss and postpartum, and during the menopausal transition.)

Check out the below mental health resources for women's health:

- **Women and Mental Health** (National Institute of Mental Health)
- **Perinatal Mental Health: Signs, Symptoms and Treatment** (Postpartum Support International)
- **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder** (Johns Hopkins Medicine)
- **Understanding Eating Disorders** (During the Midlife Transition) (OWH)

Remember the MCPS Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to support you! Join the EAP for an upcoming Mental Health Awareness Month workshop on *Building Your Resilience* on May 14 from 4:30–5:30 p.m. Register for [Professional Development Online \(PDO\)](#) course #92522, section #140595. For 1:1 no-cost and confidential counseling support, contact the EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday from 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.) to schedule an appointment.

Well Aware Resources

MCPS medical insurance partners have excellent resources for physical and mental health needs. Both medical plans also offer video visits, making mental health care more accessible to us. Whether you are a member of Cigna or Kaiser Permanente, you will find your options below:

Kaiser Permanente—

- [Mental Health Resources and Tools](#)
- [Self-Care Resources](#)
- [Video Visits](#)

Cigna—

- [Mental Health Support](#)
- [Lifestyle Management](#)
- [Video Visits](#)

Check out these Women's Health resources from [Kaiser Permanente](#). [Learn more](#) about Women's Health topics from Cigna; see flyers from [Visana Health](#) and [Know Your Lemons](#).

Wellbeats Wellness: Take Charge of Your Well-being

In today's fast-paced, always-connected world, it's easy to overlook the need for self-care. But taking even a few moments to recharge can positively impact your mental health and overall well-being.

As a part of your benefits, you have access to Wellbeats Wellness, which offers thousands of on-demand classes for taking a break or even recharging throughout your day.

Ready to take charge of your mental well-being? Be sure to see this [Wellbeats flyer](#).

Access Wellbeats via the mobile app or on your internet browser and log in with your work email address. Explore on-demand, expert-led fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes on Wellbeats Wellness today. [Learn more](#).

Group Forming Now for Summer Session of Head Heart Hands

Registration is underway for a summer session of *Head Heart Hands*, a fun and inspiring program that gives participants the knowledge, tools, and support to lose weight permanently and reach their health goals.

This 12-week wellness program is a comprehensive learning program with 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.

Email Well Aware for more information and to register.

Bike to Work Day Will Be Here Soon!

Join thousands of commuters across the Washington, D.C. region for Bike to Work Day on Thursday, May 15, 2025. Whether you're a seasoned cyclist or just starting, this fun, free event is the perfect way to celebrate clean commuting, get some fresh air, and enjoy the ride.

With 100+ pit stops, giveaways, and great energy all around, there's no better time to hop on your bike and be part of the movement.

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) is sponsoring eight pit stops and will raffie off several prizes, including two bikes at each pit stop. Check out the locations [here](#).

Sign up and make your commute count!

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](#).