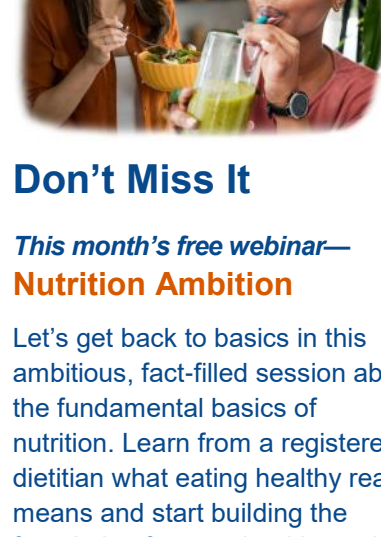


November Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, a middle school alternative programs teacher and Restorative Justice coordinator who is coordinating six Wellness Wednesday programs for the school year;
- a webinar to discover what eating healthy really means and start building the foundation for your healthy eating journey;
- American Diabetes Month;
- support to help you stop smoking from the Employee Assistance Program and Well Aware;
- the Wellbeats *Rest, Revive, Thrive* program; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—**Nutrition Ambition**

Let's get back to basics in this ambitious, fact-filled session about the fundamental basics of nutrition. Learn from a registered dietitian what eating healthy really means and start building the foundation for your healthy eating journey.

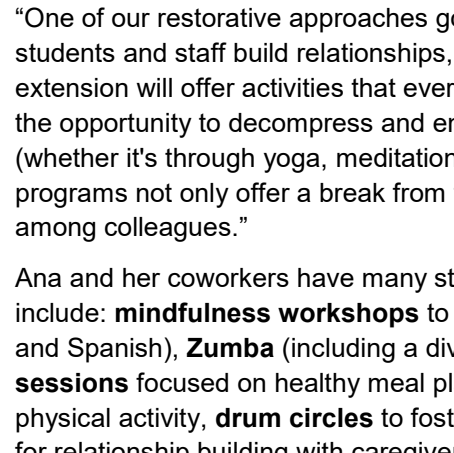
Wednesday November 20, 2024
Webinar
4:30–5:30 p.m.

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 Coordinates Wellness Wednesdays at Her Middle School

Ana L. Lopez, alternative programs teacher and Restorative Justice coordinator, Argyle Middle School



Ana Lopez (front right) and an Argyle Middle School staff kickball team

Ana Lopez, alternative programs teacher and Restorative Justice coordinator at Argyle Middle School, is coordinating six Wellness Wednesday programs to be held throughout the school year. Wellness Wednesdays will provide opportunities for students and staff to take part in wellness activities.

Ana believes health and wellness programs provide the foundation for overall well-being, productivity, and happiness.

"For educators, maintaining good physical and mental health ensures that we can show up every day for our students, model healthy behaviors, and manage the challenges of teaching effectively," Ana said. "Personally, wellness helps me stay energized, balanced, and better equipped to deal with stress."

Ana recognizes specific health and wellness needs for middle school staff.

"When staff prioritize wellness, they perform better in the classroom, both mentally and physically," Ana said. "Middle school can be a stressful environment with its unique academic, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Educators often take on the emotional burdens of their students. Healthy staff are more resilient, better able to self-regulate emotions, and build stronger relationships with students. Furthermore, staff well-being directly impacts students by fostering a positive and supportive learning environment."

Ana is certain that staff will respond positively to the school's Wellness Wednesday program.

"One of our restorative approaches goals for this year is to find innovative ways to help students and staff build relationships," Ana said. "The Wellness Wednesday after-school extension will offer activities that everyone can participate in. Staff and students will have the opportunity to decompress and engage in activities that support their well-being (whether it's through yoga, meditation, group walks, or healthy cooking sessions). These programs not only offer a break from the typical routine but also promote camaraderie among colleagues."

Ana and her coworkers have many staff programs planned for the school year. They include: **mindfulness workshops** to support emotional regulation, **yoga** (offered in English and Spanish), **Zumba** (including a diverse group of facilitators), **nutrition education sessions** focused on healthy meal planning, **fitness challenges** to encourage regular physical activity, **drum circles** to foster reflection and emotional well-being, a **bike-a-thon** for relationship building with caregivers, and **kickball/softball teams**.

Ana has advice for other schools looking to expand their staff wellness program:

- **Start small and build gradually.** Focus on easy-to-implement initiatives—like mindfulness moments or step challenges—before rolling out larger programs.
- **Involve staff in the planning process**—Get feedback to ensure the activities align with their needs and interests.
- **Make it a priority**—Dedicate time within the schedule (e.g., Wellness Wednesdays) so staff can participate without guilt or additional stress.
- **Lead by example**—Having school leaders participate in wellness programs sets a positive tone and encourages others to join.
- **Celebrate progress and participation**—Recognize staff who engage in wellness programs to maintain motivation and a sense of accomplishment.

"Fostering a culture of wellness within schools ensures that educators feel valued and supported," Ana said. This leads to a more positive work environment and better outcomes for students."

November is American Diabetes Month

Observed every November, American Diabetes Month is an important part of the American Diabetes Association's efforts to focus our nation's attention on the disease and the tens of millions of people affected by it.

Because there is no cure for diabetes, the focus is on prevention. If you have risk factors or **symptoms**, or are pre-diabetic, the following are ways to prevent or delay onset of diabetes:

Get physically active. Just 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, five times a week, reduces your risk of diabetes. If you haven't been active, start with 5–10 minutes a day and gradually work your way up to 30 minutes.

Eat healthy. It may seem hard to eat healthy if you are on a budget or always crunched for time. You are more likely to adopt healthy eating habits if you start with small changes. Look for ways to make your meals healthy by choosing—

- non-starchy vegetables—carrots, broccoli, green beans, kale, and cauliflower;
- lean meats—skinless chicken and turkey and lean cuts of pork and beef;
- low-fat dairy products—skim milk and fat-free yogurt;
- whole grains—brown rice, barley, farro, quinoa; and
- healthy fats (in small amounts)—olive, canola, sunflower, and peanut oil.

If you smoke or use tobacco—quit!

[Learn more.](#)

Well Aware Physical Activity Challenges Continue

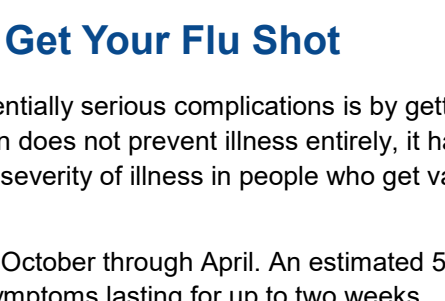
The fall physical activity challenge continues! The *MCPS on the Move* challenge is not only getting MCPS employees moving, but it is also establishing long-term healthy habits. There also is a lot of school and team competition for the grand prize grants! It is not too late to join us! [Learn more.](#)

When *MCPS on the Move* ends, the challenge will still 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.

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

Monthly Connection: Quit Smoking



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 EAP (Employee Assistance Program) and Well Aware (the MCPS Employee Wellness Program), are excited to work together to bring you monthly topics focusing on mental and physical health. These resources will help you align your wellness journey to ensure that you are focusing on both physical and mental health.

EAP Resources

Information on the physical health benefits of quitting smoking is widely publicized. Did you know there is also a connection between mental health and tobacco use? Individuals with mental health or substance use challenges are more likely to use tobacco and have a harder time quitting. Quitting smoking can help reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, stress, and improve long-term positive mood. Help is available. Check out these **Strategies for Quitting Tobacco** from the National Alliance on Mental Illness. And remember to practice being kind to yourself.

The MCPS EAP is here to support you. You can reach the EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.). For additional information on the services available from the EAP, check out our [web page](#) on the MCPS website.

Well Aware Resources

Quitting smoking is not easy. It takes time and a plan. You don't have to stop smoking in one day; you just start with one day.

Quitting starts here! Start day one with one of many resources to help you take the first step to being tobacco free. Quitting smoking has immediate and long-term benefits at any age. Quitting is hard, but you can increase your chances of success with help. Getting help through counseling or medications can double or triple your chance of quitting successfully.

Great American Smokeout 2024—Let this year's Great American Smokeout be the day you start your journey toward a smoke-free life. You will be joining thousands of smokers across the country in taking an important step toward a healthier life and reducing your cancer risk. Plus, the American Cancer Society has the **resources and support** you need to quit.

The Great American Smokeout will take place on Thursday, November 21. This annual event is organized by the American Cancer Society to encourage people to quit smoking and live a healthier life. [Learn more about the Great American Smokeout.](#)

Quit for Good—MCPS and Kaiser Permanente are again teaming up to bring you the *Quit for Good* tobacco cessation program. The free program is available to employees and their spouses, regardless of whether or not you participate in MCPS employee benefits or if you participate with Kaiser.

Now shorter in length, and held via webinar, it is easier than ever to take the first steps to becoming tobacco free. Classes will cover the skills necessary to quit and successfully live tobacco-free. Learn more about the program by visiting the [Tobacco Cessation web page](#).

Start your new year off right! The next class starts in January 2025.

Wellness Initiatives

It Is Not Too Early to Take the Wellness Initiatives for 2026

Did you miss the opportunity to save money on your 2025 health insurance premium? Did you know that every year you have an opportunity to earn up to 2 percent back on your health insurance premium contributions by simply having an annual physical exam and filling out an online health assessment? For more information, please visit the [Wellness Initiatives website](#). Start working on your 2026 incentive now!

Stress Less this Fall

The holidays are approaching, so more than ever we need to find time for stress management. Stress can negatively affect your emotional wellness, as well as your physical health. It makes it harder to think clearly, function effectively, and enjoy life.

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.

This fall, Well Aware is continuing its online, live, recorded, and on-site classes for your convenience. From yoga and seated yoga, to mindfulness and tai chi, there is something for everyone. Consider giving 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 for class links and updates. [Opt in to this email distribution list.](#)

Join Us for Online Physical Activity

Movement 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 and mind, and help you manage your stress and overall wellness.

This fall, Well Aware is continuing its online, live, recorded, and on-site 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 for class links and updates. [Opt-in to this email distribution list.](#)

Avoid the Flu This Year: Get Your Flu Shot

The best way to prevent flu and its potentially serious complications is by getting a yearly flu vaccine. Even when a flu vaccination does not prevent illness entirely, it has been shown in several studies to reduce the severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick.

The typical flu is active each year from October through April. An estimated 5-20 percent of Americans get the flu each year with symptoms lasting for up to two weeks.

The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to be effective, so it is important to get the vaccine as early as possible. During the two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop in the body and provide protection against the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone get a flu vaccine each year by the end of October, but you can get it anytime.

Both Cigna and Kaiser Permanente have laid out detailed plans for getting this year's flu shot.

- [Cigna](#)
- [Kaiser Permanente](#)

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.

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. [Check out the Well Aware Toolbox](#) to see what self-care resources will work best for you!

Wellbeats Wellness: Rest, Revive, Thrive

Did you know that sleep is closely connected to our physical, mental, and emotional well-being? When we don't get enough quality sleep, it can amplify stress, affecting our mood, productivity, and overall health. Prioritizing sleep and adding movement in your daily routine can lead to a noticeable increase in energy, improved focus, and enhanced overall well-being.

As a part of your benefits, you have access to Wellbeats Wellness, which offers thousands of on-demand classes that can help you improve your sleep. Complete the Sleep & Movement program by November 30, 2024, for a chance to win a Wellbeats Wellness accessories gift card!

Ready to start the Sleep & Movement Program? Access Wellbeats via the mobile app or on your internet browser and log in with your work email address.

See the [Rest, Revive, Thrive program flyer](#), and [calendar](#).

Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente 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 will 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

To learn more and apply, visit [omadahealth](#).

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.

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](#).