

September Well Aware eNews

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

- This month's wellness champion, an elementary school guidance counselor who helps MCPS staff live healthy lives by teaching Zumba classes;
- a webinar on the surprising impact of food on mental health;
- a reprise of Well Aware's inaugural physical activity challenge: *MCPS on the Move*;
- the annual RUN@WORK Day;
- a 5K training program for the fall;
- Omada: a personalized weight-loss program for Cigna members; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—
The Surprising Impact Food Has on Your Mental Health**

Does food impact your mood? Yes, it does. It also affects your energy and more. Learn how foods impact you physically, emotionally, and mentally from the moment you eat them.

Wednesday, September 20, 2023
4:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.

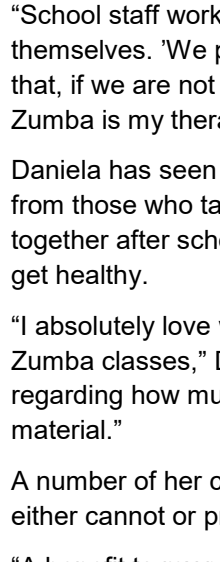
Please email [Well Aware](#) to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a link to the webinar in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

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

Presented by: Kaiser Permanente

Wellness Champion Teaches Zumba to Keep Staff Motivated

**Mrs. Daniela S. Helton, Counselor,
Little Bennett Elementary School**



After learning Zumba in an MCPS-sponsored class more than 10 years ago, Daniela Helton, a counselor at Little Bennett Elementary School, took steps to help other MCPS employees live healthy lives. She became certified to teach Zumba.

"My co-workers noticed how much I enjoyed Zumba and encouraged me to get my Zumba certification," Daniela said. "Over the years, my love for Zumba grew. As a result, I decided to get two additional certifications, one to teach Zumba to children and another to certify me in Strong Nation by Zumba which features no dancing for those who might not like to dance. The three certifications have brought a lot of joy to others and to me!"

Daniela believes that health and wellness is vital for school staff.

"School staff work incredibly hard," Daniela said. "Many often forget to take care of themselves. We place others before us, but we have to keep coming back to the mindset that, if we are not okay, we will not be able to be our best to help those who need us. Zumba is my therapy and my happy place. My wish is to be open for others to feel something similar."

Daniela has seen many positive outcomes from teaching Zumba to MCPS staff. She hears from those who take her classes about how much they enjoy them. Many employees get together after school to take her classes and laugh and have fun while helping each other get healthy.

"I absolutely love when people write and leave me messages or talk to me about my Zumba classes," Daniela said. "Some have never tried Zumba before and write to me regarding how much they love it and others follow me weekly and continue to enjoy my material."

A number of her classes are recorded, making them available to more employees who either cannot or prefer not to attend the in-person classes.

"A benefit to my recorded classes is that staff can take them in the comfort and privacy of their own home if they don't feel like working out with others or if the timing of an in-person class is inconvenient," Daniela said. "Working out from home often gives people the encouragement and confidence to join a more public group when they are ready."

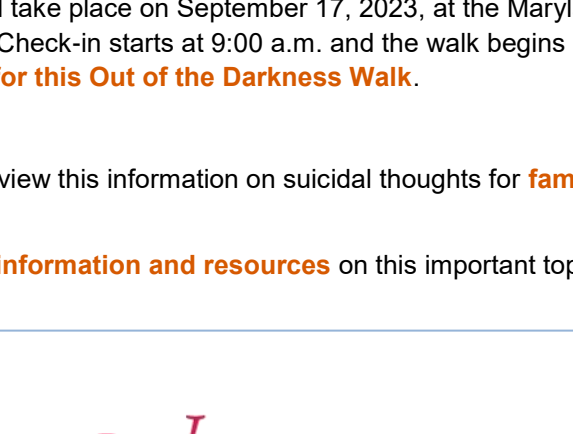
Daniela has suggestions for individuals or schools looking to start a health and wellness journey.

"I believe that promoting staff wellness shouldn't be something you bring up once a year during pre-service week, but rather monthly at staff meetings," Daniela said. "Perhaps asking staff how they are staying active, sharing healthy tips, and referencing the staff wellness web page can be a regular practice. Devoting even 5-10 minutes to discuss the importance of taking care of ourselves and each other helps staff to reflect for a moment on the need to pause and listen to our own bodies while encouraging one another."

This fall, Daniela will offer a Well-Aware-sponsored weekly class for all interested MCPS employees. Classes will be held Wednesdays at 4:00 p.m. at Little Bennett Elementary School starting September 6.

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program Monthly Connection: September is Suicide Prevention Month

Do you feel butterflies in your stomach when you are nervous, or get headaches when you are feeling stressed or under pressure?



It is likely due to the fact 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](#) and [The Bulletin](#), on the [Well Aware Toolbox](#) and [EAP](#) web pages, and more!

Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. We all have a role in helping prevent suicide in our communities. If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health emergency, immediately call 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, or call 911. The Montgomery County Crisis Center is also available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 240-777-4000 or in person at 1301 Piccard Drive, Rockville, MD 20850.

EAP Resources

EAP is here to help. You may call the in-house EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.) or our external partner EAP at 866-496-9599 (24/7/365).

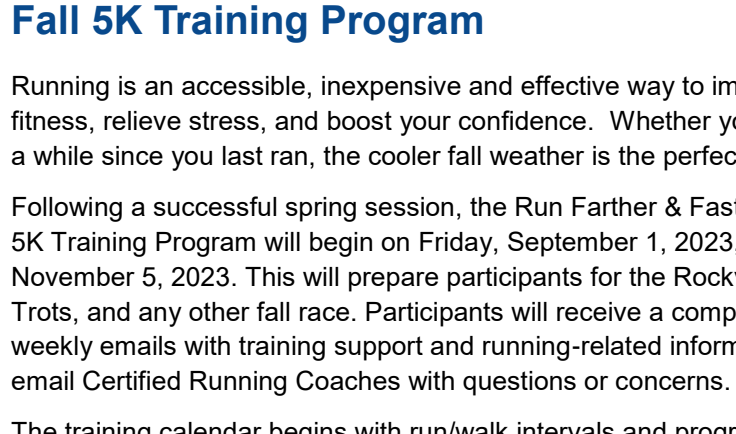
To learn more about the warning signs, risk factors, and steps to take to #BeThe1To help someone in emotional pain, visit the [National Institute of Mental Health's website](#).

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's [Out of the Darkness Community Walk](#) is an opportunity to unite in our support to prevent suicide and acknowledge the ways in which suicide has affected our lives and the lives of those we care about. The Montgomery County, MD walk will take place on September 17, 2023, at the Maryland SoccerPlex in Germantown, MD. Check-in starts at 9:00 a.m. and the walk begins at 10:00 a.m. [Join the MCPS EAP for this Out of the Darkness Walk](#).

Well Aware Resources

Kaiser Permanente members: Review this information on suicidal thoughts for [family, teens, and adults](#).

Cigna members: Be sure to read [information and resources](#) on this important topic.



Fall Physical Activity Challenge Reprise: MCPS on the Move

In 2010, Well Aware held its inaugural physical activity challenge: *MCPS on the Move*. The challenge encouraged staff to adopt lifelong exercise and healthy eating habits. *MCPS on the Move* emphasized consistency over athleticism and encouraged participants to incorporate simple, physical activities into their daily routines.

This fall, we are reprising *MCPS on the Move* as an individual or on a team! Schools and offices can work together and create their own *MCPS on the Move* teams, encourage activity, and support each other through this eight-week activity challenge.

Learn more about the *MCPS on the Move* fall challenge, including incentives, rules, and more by visiting the [Well Aware website](#). Or, simply search for "Well Aware MCPS on the Move" from any MCPS web page.

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 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 visit [Omada Health](#) to apply. For more information about the Omada program, check out this [two-minute video](#).

Get InStep with Diabetes This Fall

InStep with Diabetes is a series of three, one-hour classes that will help you better understand diabetes and the lifestyle changes needed to support healthy living. A Kaiser Permanente health educator will discuss not only why healthy eating, physical activity, and blood sugar control are important for diabetes management, but also ways to incorporate these changes into your life. The facilitator also will share resources and travel tips to further support you.

You do not have to be diabetic or pre-diabetic (or a Kaiser Permanente member) to attend this course. You can attend to support a friend or family member by learning helpful information. Registration for the fall class is open. For more information [email Well Aware](#).

RUN@WORK Day

The Road Runners Club of America will present the 16th Annual RUN@WORK Day nationwide on September 15, 2023.

Well Aware is encouraging you to plan workouts with your MCPS coworkers. The goal is to encourage adults to get 30 minutes of exercise each day— either before work, during lunch, or immediately following work—in accordance with the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

How do you participate in RUN@WORK Day? Try this [at-home training program!](#) Or, simply make time to run, walk, or do some other form of exercise for at least 30 minutes on September 15, 2023. Be sure to encourage a coworker or family member to exercise too. Tweet your pictures and tag us [@mcpswellaware](#).

Fall 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, the cooler fall weather is the perfect time to start training!

Following a successful spring session, the Run Farther & Faster MCPS Fall Virtual Group 5K Training Program will begin on Friday, September 1, 2023, and run through Sunday, November 5, 2023. This will prepare participants for the Rockville 5K, upcoming Turkey Trots, and any other fall race. Participants will receive a comprehensive training calendar, weekly emails with training support and questions-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 toward continuous running. It also includes strength workouts and form drills. Interested participants also will 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.

Wellness Initiatives

Deadline Approaching to Save Money on Your Health Insurance in 2024

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Wellness Initiatives program provides you with incentives to reduce your health insurance costs. If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan, complete a biometric health screening and your insurance provider's online health risk assessment by October 6, 2023—and yearly thereafter—to take advantage of the rate reductions in 2024 and beyond.

You can pay 1 percent less of the total cost of your health insurance in 2024 by seeing your doctor or, if you are a Cigna member, visiting a Quest Patient Services Center for an annual physical. For an additional 1 percent credit, complete a health risk assessment on your medical plan's website by October 6, 2023.

Take the Wellness Initiative! [Learn more](#).

Virtual Staff Wellness Day

During the Professional Day on Wednesday, November 1, 2023, Well Aware, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna are coming together to present a virtual wellness day! Take a few minutes out of your professional 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. [See the class schedule, links, and class descriptions](#).

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 fall group is registering! [Email Well Aware](#) for more information.

HFP Live Now Available to MCPS Employees

Well Aware is pleased to announce that MCPS and Cigna have specifically for provide access to *HFP Live*, a wellness livestream and video library built particularly for employees who are hard at work. *HFP Live* will broadcast 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.

Stress Less This Fall

As summer winds down, and we get back into the fall routine, 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 our online virtual live and recorded classes, and adding some onsite 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 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 our online live and recorded classes, and adding some onsite, in-person classes as well. 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 update to stay up to date on class links, and updates. [Opt-in to this email distribution list](#).

Wellbeats Is for All!

MCPS staff has free access to Wellbeats! Wellbeats offers a 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, and can also download classes to play when you are offline. Check out the attached [flyer](#) for login information. In the meantime, enjoy this [welcome video](#), and this video showing you that [Wellbeats is for All!](#)

Check out the Preventive Health program for September: Taking small steps can make a big difference when it comes to improving health and wellness. No matter your age, ability level, or interest, it's never too late to start developing healthy habits that can positively impact your life. You can safely ease into these habits and see the benefits starting today. Whether it's walking for five or 10 minutes a day, eating more fruits and vegetables, or learning to meditate, Wellbeats can help guide and support you in your pursuit of better health. [Learn more](#).

Also, give these Back-to-School classes a try:

- [School Lunches](#)
- [Stocking a Healthy Pantry](#)
- [Getting Kids Interested in Nutrition](#)

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employee 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. Follow the hashtag [#mcpsstaffwellness](#) for tweets!

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](#).

Free Access to Montgomery County 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.

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