

January Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champions, two teachers who refurbished and successfully promoted their school's staff tranquility room;
- a webinar to help you tune in to your body and mind so you can identify self-care practices that bring balance to your eating habits and mood;
- other ways to stress less during the winter;
- a new meditation series;
- Wellbeats' *A Stronger You* program;
- a 10k-steps-a-day walking program;
- the upcoming virtual staff wellness day; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—**Food and Mood**

Learn to tune in to your body *and* mind so you can identify self-care practices that bring balance to your eating habits and mood.

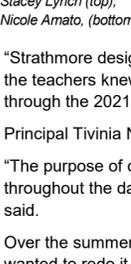
Wednesday, January 26, 2023
4:30–5:30 p.m.

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**.

Presented by: Kaiser Permanente

Wellness Champions Revamp and Promote Their School's Staff Tranquility Room



Stacey Lynch (top),
Nicole Amato, (bottom)

Mrs. Stacey H. Lynch, staff development teacher, and Ms. Nicole A. Amato, classroom teacher, Strathmore Elementary School

After discovering that Strathmore Elementary School has a special space for staff to relax during breaks, Stacey Lynch, staff development teacher, and Nicole Amato, classroom teacher, went to work to update the room. With the help of their principal, Ms. Tivinia G. Nelson, Stacey and Nicole revamped the **Strathmore Elementary School Tranquility Room** into a more relaxing spot for the school's employees.

"Strathmore designated the Tranquility Room several years ago," Stacey said. "Not all of the teachers knew it was there or had forgotten about it. I found out about it halfway through the 2021-2022 school year."

Principal Tivinia Nelson explained the reason for establishing the room.

"The purpose of creating the Tranquility Room was to give staff space for mindful moments throughout the day, similar to the sensory corners every class created for students," Tivinia said.

Over the summer, Stacey showed the room to her coworker, Nicole. They decided they wanted to redo it to make it even more relaxing. They spoke to Tivinia about their idea.

"We gave her a shopping list and she made magic happen by ordering the items," Stacey said.

The staff had very positive reactions to the space after watching a video of the room during a staff meeting.

"They LOVED it," Stacey said. "They couldn't wait to use the tranquility room. The snacks were a huge hit, and they are definitely using the sound machine with the essential oils."

Wellness doesn't stop with the Tranquility Room at Strathmore Elementary. Stacey and Nicole started a self-care group last year, which includes a group chat and posted weekly wellness challenges.

We try to switch up the challenges to make them fun," Stacey said. "We even had some Olympic-themed challenges."

They are continuing the group again this year. They have plans to start a Zumba group that will meet once a week after school. In the staff lounge, they rearranged the furniture to make it more functional and added a big coloring poster on the wall as a creative way to relieve stress.

Stacey has suggestions for those interested in starting a wellness program at their school.

"Take it slow by starting with small changes," Stacey said. "Do a Google search to see what other schools are doing. There are lots of resources out there to help!"

For details, visit Well Aware's **Flights to Fitness web page**.

Take the Wellness Initiatives

It Is Not Too Early to Reduce Your Share of Health Insurance Costs for 2024

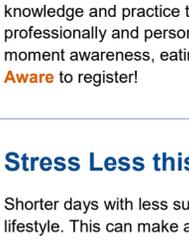
If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan through CareFirst or Kaiser Permanente, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your 2023 health insurance with the Wellness Initiatives program. To take full advantage of these rate reductions, complete a biometric 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 2024, you have until October 6, 2023, 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**.

The Try-Athlon Challenge Has Ended



More than 5,000 MCPS employees worked hard last fall to reach their goals during the *Try-Athlon* physical activity challenge. Across MCPS, employees enjoyed the camaraderie with their coworkers, along with the associated health gains. They competed for prizes, and more importantly, adopted or maintained healthy lifestyles. Each of the top 15 schools averaged at least 75 minutes of physical activity per employee per day.

Join Well Aware for a New Meditation Series

Join Well Aware for a workshop series on mindfulness. This workshop will provide both knowledge and practice time to help you create more wellness in your life both professionally and personally. The workshop will cover breathing, body scan, present moment awareness, eating meditation, and much more. **Learn more** and **email Well Aware** to register!

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 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.

Online Physical Activity Classes for Winter

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 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!

Consider trying Well Aware's online classes to see what kind of physical activity is best for you. We offer many classes to meet your needs, including Zumba, HIIT Camp, Stretch and Mobility, Core workouts, Yoga, and toning.

Email Well Aware for a monthly calendar of classes.

Join Wellbeats' A Stronger You!

Need help creating a health and wellness routine?

In just 10 minutes a day (or less), you can build a healthier, stronger you. Join the Wellbeats' 14-day *A Stronger You* program for a schedule of short fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes to start fresh and stay motivated.

If you are looking for a well-rounded, holistic wellness plan that does not require a lot of time or commitment, this program is perfect for you. All you need to do is join the program and Wellbeats' expert-led, virtual trainers will guide you every step of the way. See the *A Stronger You flyer* and **program calendar**.

Montgomery County Offers MCPS Employees Free Access to Its Recreation Facilities

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 may reapply each year to continue your access to the facilities.

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employees 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!

Check Out Our Online Health and Wellness "Toolbox"

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, brings you the *Well Aware Wellness Toolbox*, a web page with many resources for MCPS staff. 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!

Isn't It Time You Quit for Good?

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, 2023. **Learn more**.

TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAM



Dare to Walk 10K A Day?

Join Well Aware for a step program that will motivate you to walk more as you visit international cities, including Sydney, Mexico City, Dublin, Bangkok, Cairo, and Buenos Aires. Integrate with 60+ of your favorite devices and mobile apps, including Apple Health, Fitbit, and more!

The journey starts on January 9, 2023. **Email Well Aware** for details.

A Virtual Staff Wellness Day is Coming!

Well Aware, Healthier Generation, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna will come together during the professional day on Friday January 27, 2023, to present a virtual staff 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 descriptions and schedule** or **email Well Aware** for details.

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**.