

Birch Grove Community School & Community Service Weekly Newsletter

April 17, 2026

Tuesday, April 21 ~ School Board Meeting at 4:00 w/Election Results

Monday, April 20-Friday, April 24 ~ MCA Testing for 3-5th Grades

Friday, May 1 ~ School is ON! Make Up Day!

Monday-Friday, May 4-8 ~ FastBridge Assessments for K-5

Wednesday-Friday, May 13-15 ~ Wolf Ridge Trip for 2-5

Tuesday, May 19 ~ School Board Meeting at 4pm

Monday, May 25 ~ No School - Memorial Day

Thursday, May 28 ~ Last Day for Seedlings & Saplings (Until Summer Session)

Friday, May 29 ~ Graduation Celebration! 10:00am - ½ day of school. Release at 12:00.

Monday & Tuesday, June 1 & 2 ~ School is ON! FUN Make Up Days!

Saturday, June 6 ~ Gala for the Grove!

Monday, June 8 ~ First Day of Campsite Kids, Summer Seedlings & Saplings

Mission Statement:

Birch Grove Community School will promote academic excellence utilizing our unique natural setting to prepare students to become socially and environmentally responsible, self-directed, life-long learners.

From Ms. Diane Blanchette:

School Director, Birch Grove Community School

Lead Coordinator, Birch Grove Community Service

It was a busy week with much happening in the building: a final round of Q-Comp teacher observations and reflections (with former BG teacher, Laurie Robertson), a site visit from our school authorizer, Minnesota Comprehension Assessment (MCA) preparation, and Kindergarten Round Up! All in all, a satisfying week with much accomplished. Next week will find a majority of the school (3rd - 5th grade) taking the MCA tests.

MCA Tests: Monday and Tuesday will focus on the reading assessments for grades 3-5. Wednesday and Thursday, math is



the focus for grades 3-5. On Friday, the 5th graders will be taking the science MCA and we will also be continuing any testing that was not finished during the week. PLEASE see to it that your child gets plenty of rest the night before testing – it makes a difference! Later in this news letter you will find the breakfast menu for the week. Please check it and make sure that if your child doesn't like the menu, that they have breakfast in the morning before coming to school. Please remind them to take their time testing (we are not racing to see who can be done first) and that you expect them to do their best work and show off their big brains! If you have any questions, please let us know.

Be sure to check the upcoming schedule at the top of the newsletter as there are many activities and events that happen at the end of each school year. Sometimes there are unexpected additions, so always check to see what is coming up!

[Gala for the Grove 2026!](#)

2026 Theme: Hats & Horses: The Hometown Derby

A Kentucky Derby-Inspired Night of Racing, Roses, and Giving for Birch Grove

Saturday, June 6, 2026

The Gala for the Grove, a spirited fundraiser for Birch Grove Community School, is semi-formal in the Lakeside Ballroom at Surfside in Tofte. Dress for the theme or not, the choice is yours – it will be a great time either way!

An announcement will be made when tickets are available for this annual fundraiser for Birch Grove!



<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/gala-for-the-grove>

Learning new skillz after school at Birch Buddies ~ Crochet!

<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/birch-buddies>





Breakfast Menu for 3-5th Grade During MCA Week!

April 20-24

Monday, April 20: Oatmeal, muffins, fresh fruit, milk/juice

Tuesday, April 21: Breakfast Sandwiches, yogurt, fresh fruit, milk/juice

Wednesday, April 22: Sausage, bagels & cream cheese, fresh fruit, milk/juice

Thursday, April 23: Scrambled eggs, French toast sticks, fresh fruit, milk/juice

Friday, April 24: (Grade 5 Only): Cereal choices, fresh fruit, milk/juice

Wednesday, cold lunch from home reminder!

As the school year carries on, sometimes we forget some things...



Please do not send items that need to be **cooked** in microwaves, **ONLY send things that need to be heated up.** There is not enough time in the 30 minutes of lunch for multiple students to **cook** their food. If you need to send microwavable mac & cheese to school for lunch, please cook it at home and send in a container where the food can then just be heated up. A pain I know, but so is having 40+ children at lunch time with not enough time for some to heat their food up. Please refrain from sending food that needs to be

cooked until the end of the year, and I will look into finding multiple carts that will hold multiple microwaves for the next school year. Hopefully, this is a good compromise! Thank you for your understanding!

Please also note that when it gets warm enough to eat outside, please send a complete cold lunch as microwaves are not available outside. Thank you!

Spring in Minnesota brings a vibrant influx of migratory birds. This lesson compared the different songbirds like the American Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, Eastern Bluebirds, warblers, Baltimore Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, and Scarlet Tanagers. We noted their different distinctive singing calls from a loud cheerily cheer-up cheerio to a rapid tut tut tut. Saplings learned that Robins, Starlings, Bluebirds and Grackles are often seen on lawns searching for earthworms and insects. Each Sapling produced their own painting of a Minnesota bird.

<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/saplings-program>



More pictures can be found on the school Facebook page.

[Facebook](#)



School Board Elections

Tuesday, April 21, 2026
at the regular school board meeting at 4:00

Seats Up:

Judy Motschenbacher: running unopposed

Mary VanDoren: running unopposed

Two seats remain open on the board.

One ballot will be sent on Monday, April 6, to each BGCS family, staff and employee. Please send ballots back to Birch Grove by Monday, April 20.



Front row: Judy Motschenbacher, Skip Lamb.
Back row: Sara Knottski, Mary VanDoren, Sarena Crowley.



For more board or election information go to:
<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/school-board>

Yeehaw! It was a great Kindergarten Round Up at Birch Grove Community School! If your child missed this event, no worries, you can always check out Birch Grove at our annual Dress To Play Open House on August 12 from 5-7pm or, schedule a personal tour any time! Birch Grove Community School... "Where Roots Grow Deep and Branches Reach High!"

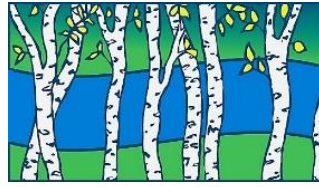
<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/>



More pictures can be found on the school Facebook page.

[Facebook](#)

Please have your child read (or be read to) 20-30 minutes per day/night (or more!). If there is one thing that you can do at home that has a huge positive impact on your child's academic growth, this is it! Happy reading!



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School Spirit Store Link: <https://birchgrove.logosoftware.com/> You can use GRAB15 for 15% off
Face Book: [Birch Grove Community School and Community Services #4145 | Facebook](#)



From Ms. Emily VanDoren

Seedling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service

The theme of the week was birds in Seedlings. We read several books that showed different types of birds, how birds build nests, and how birds sometimes leave for winter and return in the spring. While out for our morning walks, we tried to find birds through sight and sound. We heard seagulls and crows and even spotted a few seagulls flying high up in the sky. In the afternoons we spent time watching out from the window to see if we could spot any birds. We were able to spy some Dark-eyed Juncos or "snowbirds" gathering seeds from the ground and collecting material to build their nests. We had to practice being quiet so we wouldn't scare the birds away. If they did get scared, we were able to see how fast they can fly!

Our sensory table was transformed into a "bird's nest" filled with brown paper grass and complete with plastic eggs and pictures of birds of different sizes. We also had long plastic worms that could be "fed" to the birds for a yummy treat. The Seedlings worked their fine motor skills by opening and closing the eggs. They also practiced color recognition with the eggs and their counting skills by counting how many worms were fed to the birds.



For our activities this week, we sang a song called Five Little Chickadees and used visual aids to count down from 5 to 0. We worked together to line up pictures of identical birds from smallest to biggest. We listened to different bird sounds and then pretended to be birds by flapping our wings

and making our own tweeting and chirping sounds. We finished the week by creating our own bird nest by using paper plates and clear tape for the base and then used our fine motor skills to tear and place brown paper sticks and cotton balls onto the nest.

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From Ms. Pam Holm

Sapling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service

Seeds, Sprouts, Shoots and Stalks was the spring theme for the week, during which we discussed the life cycle of flowers, fruits and vegetables, and identified the letter 'S', discovering objects in the room that start with this letter.

Monday the Saplings bloomed with excitement as they learned about Japanese Cherry Trees, or Sakura! They explored how these trees represent friendship, new beginnings, and the beauty of spring. Saplings created a simple design of black branches with Japanese brushes and ink adorned with pink cherry leaves on a scroll.



Following the reading of Jack and the Beanstalk on Tuesday, we conducted an in-depth analysis of newly introduced vocabulary, including harp, Ogre, stalk, widow, market, stall, and beanstalk. Students retold the narrative, honing their sequencing skills. Additionally, we introduced fractions through a hands-on activity, measuring Jack's ascent up the stalk. We utilized the giant's and Jack's footprints to measure various objects within the classroom.

Wednesday Saplings delved into Henri Matisse's flower paintings. Creating their own flower painting. Our math and manipulatives activities consisted of sequencing flowers by size and sequencing the life cycle of tulips, in addition to counting flowers and creating graph tallies. Shape and number recognition and tracing sheets were also utilized.

With a smaller group on Thursday, they explored the magic of gardens! They learn where food comes from, plant seeds, and tend to our own garden while learning vocabulary like soil, root, and harvest. This hand-on experience encouraged responsibility, social-emotional growth, and a curiosity for nature, including daily observations of plant growth.

Our conversation on Friday delved into the topic of tulips, tracing their evolution from bulbs, and incorporated a painting activity inspired by Georgia O'Keeffe, where the Saplings were urged to examine nature and magnify its details.

Spring weather is full of changes and surprises. Please make sure your child is prepared to stay warm and dry for extended periods of time outdoors each day with lots of weather appropriate layers and footwear. Also needed, a complete change of indoor clothes.

Saplings love when everyday is different – that's what makes life fun and beautiful!

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**From Ms. Sara Knottski**  
*K & 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Elementary Teacher*

Kindergarten round-up was a huge success! K/1 did great being the older kids in the classroom. They had a blast painting their birdhouses, playing with new and old friends, and showing the younger students our classroom.

This week brought changes to our routine. With Mrs. Forster out on maternity leave, we transitioned into working more with 2/3 graders. K/1 did a great job with this change! We are doing our reading learning in 2/3 during the mornings and spending math time in K/1 in the afternoons. We are also looking forward to do some project-based learning and outdoor education with 2/3.



First grade worked on opinion writing this week. We focused on identifying a topic sentence and giving detailed sentences to tell the reasons for our opinions. The kindergartners are practicing reading, writing, and letters. We are working on including spacing, punctuation, and correct spelling in our writing. In math, the first graders and kindergartners learned about time and shapes. We can tell the time to the hour and a half hour. Students practiced drawing and identifying key traits of shapes.

The students don't seem to be phased by the temperamental weather. They are excited when it is warm and sunny and when it's cold and rainy. This week, many of them were experimenting and

manipulating the thick mud, puddles, and the new 'rivers' in the woods. Expect them to come home wet and happy!

Have a great weekend!

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From Ms. Sara Knottski (Subbing for Ms. Forster during her maternity leave)

2nd & 3rd Grade Elementary Teacher

This week was a transitional week for 2/3! With Ms. Forster on maternity leave, students adjusted to different routines, expectations, and a new but old teacher for most! They did a great job listening, staying focused on their learning, and being helpful to others. I heard a lot of comments on how 2nd and 3rd graders felt like they were in K/1 again because of the changes. By the end of next week, they will be comfortable with their new routines.



3rd-grade spent the week practicing for the MCAs next week. We discussed testing strategies, taking our time on the test, and reviewing practice questions. 3rd grade spent part of two afternoons with Mrs. Coronis reviewing what the online test will look like and the tools that they will have access to. We reviewed math concepts we haven't practiced in a while, and we did a lot of reading and comprehension work. We are ready to rock the test next week!

2nd grade reviewed 2-D and 3-D shapes and measuring. We discussed different units of measurement, such as yard, meter, inch, foot, etc., and we discussed what would be the appropriate unit of measurement to measure in with objects like a feather, a foot race, and the distance between Duluth and the Twin Cities. In reading, we spent time practicing our reading comprehension, spelling, and reviewing prefixes and suffixes.

Reminders: Next week is MCAs for 3rd grade! Please have your child get lots of rest and talk with them about the importance of trying their hardest and taking their time!

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**From Ms. Stacy Coronis**

*4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Elementary Teacher*

The 4/5 students have been reviewing the 4th and 5th grade math and reading standards in final preparation for the MCA tests next week. We will be taking the reading test on Monday and Tuesday mornings and the math test on Wednesday and Thursday mornings. The 5th graders will take the science test on Friday. Please make sure that your child gets plenty of rest next week so that they can do their best next week. All students will be served breakfast at Birch Grove on testing days, thanks so much Ms. Angie!!



In writing we have wrapped up our personal narrative project and the final published essays represent a lot of hard work. It was fun to see all of the students take center stage for our Author's Chair time. After reading their essays out loud students called on peers for compliments and questions. I was impressed with how respectful and supportive everyone was towards their peers. Our next piece of published writing after the MCA week will be focused on researching a topic of choice to begin our Passion Projects. Stay tuned.....

In our content area we have started a science unit on water systems and conservation. Students reviewed the water cycle this week and then created their own poster using a project checklist. This tool keeps kids organized with their project work as well as gives explicit project expectations. We are excited to complete more writing projects once the MCA tests are finished!

We are eagerly waiting to get some warmer and drier weather so that we can do more outdoor learning! Please send your child with weather appropriate outerwear and cross your fingers for warm and sunny days!

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