

Birch Grove Community School & Community Service Weekly Newsletter

April 2, 2026

Friday, April 3 ~ No School, PD for Staff
Friday, April 10 ~ 911 For Kids! K-3 at 1:30
Wednesday, April 15 ~ VOA Spring Site Visit
Thursday, April 16 ~ Kindergarten Round Up!
Tuesday, April 21 ~ School Board Meeting at 4:00 w/Election Results
Monday, April 20-Friday, April 24 ~ MCA Testing for 3-5th Grades

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*

Welcome back from Spring Break! It was good to get away for a while and it was good to get back as well. Your children were missed!

This four day week was a busy one with classrooms continuing to learn benchmarks and standards as well as preparing for upcoming assessments, both the MCAs and FastBridge. More information on assessments will be coming throughout the next few weeks.

Please note that there is no school tomorrow, Friday, April 3. Enjoy the Easter weekend along with all of the new snow we are supposed to receive. Super happy that the snow is not coming on a school day, as we don't want to add any more days to the calendar! Whew!



Look who got caught being good!

[Gala for the Grove 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>



The April hot lunch menu is posted on the school website at:
<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/School-Lunches>
April looks yummy!

Changes to the school calendar:

Due to the additional last snow day (that happened on a make-up day for the previous snow day), we have had to extend the school year calendar into June. There will now be school on Monday and Tuesday, June 1 and 2. We will keep the graduation celebration day the same, so this will still happen on Friday, May 29 with an early release, as we do every year. Students will return to school the following Monday and Tuesday for some planned fun events they won't want to miss! The new updated calendar is on the website. Saplings and Seedlings are not affected by this change.

NOTICE:
Important Calendar
Change

🐾Paint-By-Number: Walter! were created and presented proudly at Birch Buddies afterschool program on Friday, just before spring break. Hang with pride, Birch Grovers! 🐾

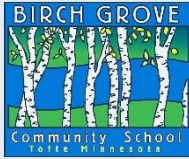
<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/birch-buddies>



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.

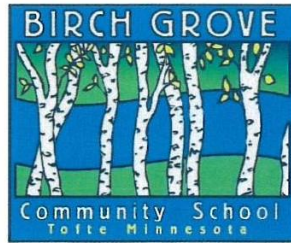
One ballot will be sent on Monday, April 6, to each BGCS family, staff and employee. Please send ballots back to Birch Grove by Monday, April 20.



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>



Yee haw ~ Kindergarten Round Up!
Birch Grove Community School

Thursday, April 16

8:00 - 12:30

**All children age eligible (must be 5 by September 1)
Are invited to spend a fun morning at BGCS!**

1/2 Day Kindergarten Experience:

- Special Projects & Fun Activities!
- Free School Lunch Provided!
- Spend Recess with Us!



The school director and K/1 teacher will be available from 12:00-12:30 to answer questions.



Cowboy/Cowgirl hats provided! Yee haw!



Meet Walter, our school therapy dog-in-training, on the way to the classroom and again at recess!



Giddyap to Kindergarten Round Up!
Registration forms can be found on the school website
www.birchgroveschool.com
or email birchgrove@boreal.org
218-663-0170



Birch Buddies ~ BEADING! afterschool program made balloon animals with silicone beads! The children helped each other as they went along, following step by step instructions. The results were accompanied by brilliant smiles! 😊😊
<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/birch-buddies>



NEW! School Castle Library Project!

As some of you may know, our current school library has plank board shelving (repainted a few times), the walls have been repainted twice since I have been here (a little over 23 years), and the library furniture was purchased when we became a charter school (a little over 20 years ago) and is still in good condition! Our little library is functional and fine, just as it is. *However*, all Minnesota schools received Library Aid funding over the past two years and Birch Grove received \$40,000. Yay! This funding can **only be used for school libraries**. It can't be used for anything else; it can **only be spent on the school library**. As such, it has been decided that the majority of the funding would be used to design the room in a castle theme, creating an environment where children can check out books, read, and work in small groups where it feels magical and sparks the imagination. I intend to create a library that is unique, a little over the top, and makes you stop and say "wow" when you enter it. I mean to take advantage of this opportunity to the benefit of Birch Grove for now and for years into the future.

A little more than half the budget will be spent on new high quality, custom library shelving units that will span two walls, plus a smaller unit for bigger, picture type books. These units will be made from oak, stained dark, will have different heights, a few doors, a few cubby holes, and two larger units to replace the metal cabinet we currently have, allowing a bit more library storage than what we have right now. The feel of the units is "old library" with "castle-y" touches. These units are anticipated to be installed at the end of May.

Some work has already started – you may have heard! Some students helped me after school to put on the crystals of our new chandeliers. 😊 New couch seating was added a few months ago. Over spring break, our new large "picture frame" was created and attached to a wall, where a new projector will shine with a variety of scenes (think a live crackling fireplace, or an ambiance scene from Harry Potter). A library table and a library staff/check out desk have been ordered. Paint has

been purchased for the walls. I scored some chairs from Facebook Market place for the table that I will paint, as well as a few other interesting items. The library will be closed at the end of this month for continued work. I anticipate that there will be a grand opening of the new Castle Library at the Dress To Play Open House on Tuesday, August 11. Huzzah!

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](#)

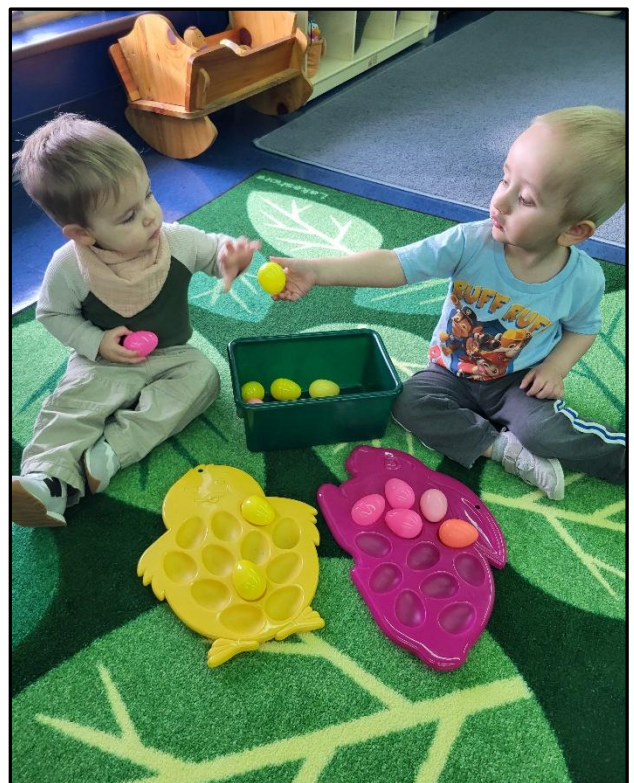


From Ms. Emily VanDoren

Seedling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service

I hope you all had a wonderful spring break! It was so nice to see the Seedlings - they all looked so much bigger! The Seedlings fell right back into the swing of things and showed off some of the new skills and words that they gained over the break.

The theme of this week was Spring and gardens. We celebrated the beautiful weather on Monday by going on our first walk of 2026. We all enjoyed getting back outside for some different sights and sounds from the classroom. Outside time is a great way to have hands-on learning to expand knowledge. We found some very large pinecones on our walk which led to the discovery of the feel and smell of pine sap. I look forward to spending more time outside when our weather warms a bit more. Please be sure to send jackets, hats, and outside footwear for our walks and outside playtime. If you would like, these items can be kept at school to make your mornings easier.



The Seedlings tried their hands at planting flowers in the sensory table this week. The table was filled with "dirt" (dried beans) and artificial flowers. We worked on fine motor skills by scooping the dirt into the jars and then placed a flower into the jar. While the Seedlings worked, we talked about how plants grow from seeds by using visual aid cards that show the process of a tomato plant growing from a seed. We also looked at real seeds and the corresponding picture of the flower or vegetable that the seed would become.

For our activities this week we recited a fun rhyme about Five Little Seeds that helped to explain how seeds are planted in the ground and they need water and sunlight to grow. We played a flower match game and practiced counting how many flowers were on different cards. The Seedlings worked on color matching by placing different colored eggs on their matching plates. We read books this week that focused on gardens and plants. The books included *I'm a Seed* by Jean Marzollo, *Dandelions Stars in the Grass* by Mia Posada, and *In the Tall, Tall Grass* by Denise Fleming.

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**From Ms. Pam Holm**

*Sapling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service*

Saplings were welcomed back from spring break with a Hippy Hoppity week! The sensory bin this week concentrated on alphabet letter matching, pairing uppercase and lowercase letters amidst a grass-filled bin containing colored eggs to match and collect in baskets. The numerous table activities included: Feeding the bunny carrots by the number on the rolled dice. Sequencing eggs according to size. Counting and quantifying chicks and bunnies. Shaping playdough into egg forms. Completing carrot color matching worksheets and pre-writing practice.



The spotlight was on bunnies on Monday, with lessons on their herbivorous habits, their continuous teeth growth and impressive 180-degree ear rotation. Saplings participated in a retelling of Peter Rabbit after they crafted Peter Rabbit puppets.

The life cycle of baby chickens was explored on Tuesday, highlighting the presence of a temporary small bump known as an 'egg tooth' on the beak of newly hatched chicks, as well as their use of chirping to communicate with their mother, culminating in a simple life cycle wheel. We used this activity to talk about how the chick grows inside the egg.

Wednesday marked April Fools' Day. Saplings were deceived with some brown Es for a snack, followed by genuine brownies. They discovered that chickens aren't the only ones that lay eggs! Birds, reptiles, fish, and even some insects like caterpillars start their lives in an egg. Saplings practiced their "E" sounds and shapes. They had an enjoyable time decorating paper eggs using oil pastels and watercolors.

Saplings had fun with rubber ducks on Thursday. A reading of Eric Carle's *10 Little Rubber Ducks* was followed by a counting exercise from 1 to 10, and an introduction to ordinal numbers, including first, second, and third, as each duck interacted with a different sea animal. They also learned about moving in different directions, such as west, east, north, and south, similar to the drifting ducks. During their art activity, they dipped rubber ducks into blue paint to create an ocean scene. Afterwards, they designed their own rubber duck.

Wishing all my little peeps an egg-cellent weekend!

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From Ms. Sara Knottski
K & 1st Grade Elementary Teacher

The students came back from spring break with lots of stories of their time off. They also came back excited to be at school and play with their friends. They were all ready for learning! It was another busy week in K/1! In language arts, we discussed character traits. We identified the actions and what the characters say to identify traits about that character. In math, we learned about time! We can read analog clocks to the hour and half hour! We also learned about measuring and comparing lengths and widths.



April showers are supposed to bring May flowers! Maybe April snow will bring lots of sunshine in May! The continued change of weather makes dressing for outdoors varied. Winter gear including snow pants, waterproof gloves, jackets, and hats are still required. Please send your child with them every day until the snow is gone! If you wish for them to leave them at school let me know! On a similar note, students have been coming in from recess soaking! If you noticed that your student comes back home with different pants on, please send back more back up clothes! We like to play hard and sometimes that means very wet pants!

Please continue to read and practice math facts at home! The students are excited to get tickets for treasure. Be sure to keep logging all reading and math practice at home so that students can get tickets!

Enjoy the long weekend!

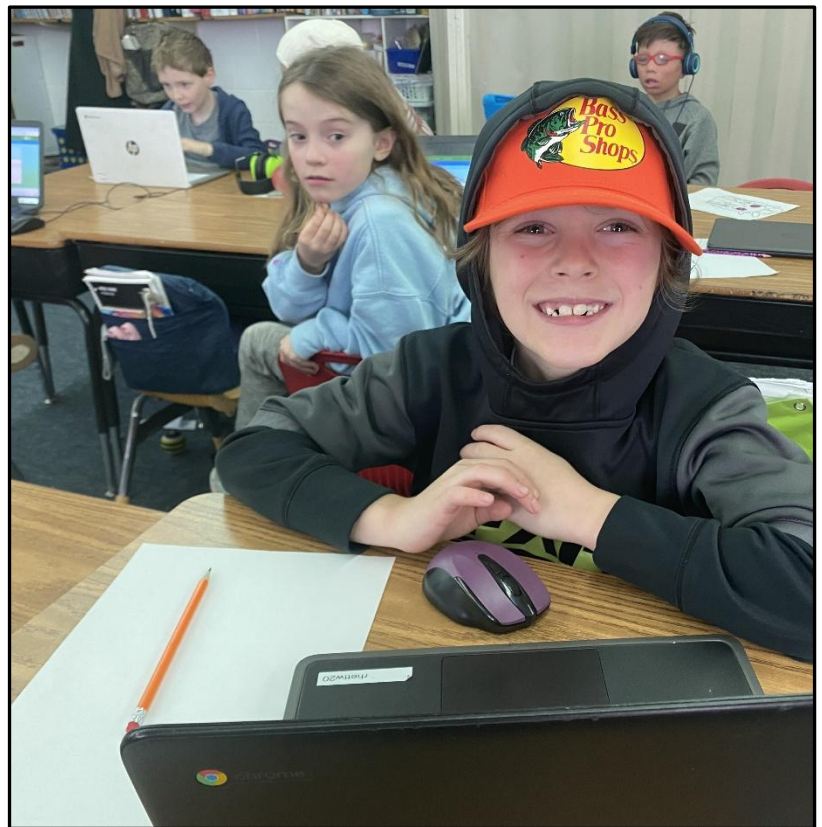
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From Ms. Samantha Forster

2nd & 3rd Grade Elementary Teacher

Welcome back! I hope that everyone had an eventful spring break. It sounds like it was amazing from all the stories I was able to hear. We were able to get back into the routine quickly and effectively which has made the week enjoyable. Students seemed to be excited to be back. We did an art project by Lois Mailou as we started to explore the African continent. It was a much needed colorful project as the weather continued to be dreary. Students also worked on a "Create-A- Creature" project. They were required to make up a creature and incorporate multiple adaptations that help their animal survive. They then created the diet, habitat, and life cycle for the animal. Lastly, we invented the fun facts and wrote a short summary to share with the class. This was such a fun project to summarize all they learned about animals and their habitats this year. I sent home a letter about my upcoming leave. If you have any questions, please reach out to me or Ms. Knottski. They have lots of fun planned for the spring and I'm jealous that I will be missing out!



In reading, we talked about seed dispersal and Mount Everest. We watched a video on Mount Everest and how pollution/garbage is taking over the famous mountaineering location. Students were so intrigued that this conversation continued over several days. Seed dispersal was another fun topic, leaving students wanting to germinate seeds at home (sorry if I started something!). Third graders worked on practicing their test strategies on MCA practice tests. They commented that this passage was easier to read because they had background knowledge from a previous lesson. This felt like a big win to me as creating background knowledge has been a core component of my instruction this year.

In math, 2nd graders worked on multiplication and division facts up to 5. This was a great review and practice on repeated addition and equal groups. We have been utilizing the platform "That Quiz". It is completely free and allows for students to practice skills quickly. Third graders continue to work on MCA test prep by completing a packet on their own and then reviewing with the group. As we worked through the problems together, we played some engaging math songs to help remember key concepts and play games to look at the information they may see on their cumulative test.

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**From Ms. Stacy Coronis**

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

It was wonderful to see everyone back at school after spring break. On Monday morning our classroom was buzzing with the class reconnecting with each other and sharing highlights from their week away from school. It warmed my heart to watch the kids listen and share so excitedly with each other!

Over the next few weeks our classroom will be wrapping up the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade math standards to be fully prepared for the MCA tests coming up. In addition to our regular math time each morning, we will have geometry in the afternoons. During our geometry time we will cover such topics as properties of quadrilaterals & triangles, drawing and measuring angles, identifying symmetry, and completing transformations including slides, flips and turns. If your child says that we have been doing a lot of math in school they are right! During this geometry block we will be using alternative methods to help us learn the standards such as playing games, using geoboards and reflection mirrors, and even creating math based art projects.



This past week we spent time wrapping up our work on identifying area of quadrilaterals using the formula  $A=L * W$ . We also used that formula to identify missing side lengths when given the area. We "leveled up" that skill by identifying the area of composite figures by breaking them up into multiple quadrilaterals. Finally, we explored the relationship between area and perimeter by "building" dog kennels for Walter to help us understand the concept that perimeter increases as the

area of a space is stretched out. This hands-on activity helped solidify that concept. In our geometry class this past week we identified angle benchmarks of 90, 180, 270 and 360 degrees. We categorized angles into straight, right, obtuse and acute. Finally, we learned how to use a protractor to measure and create angles and then we practiced those skills by playing the game Angle Tangle.

During our reading, spelling and writing blocks of time we continued our work in the textbook by reading a science fiction story and identified the story elements. During our writing time this week we finished writing our first drafts of our personal narratives, added some “spice” by using adjectives, and completed the self-edit and peer edit revisions. It has been a lot of work going through the entire writing process, but it is wonderful to see the students’ growth as writers throughout this project. After we publish our papers, each student will share their writing during an Author’s Circle.

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