

Birch Grove Community School & Community Service Weekly Newsletter

December 19, 2025

Monday, December 22 – January 4 ~ Winter Break
Monday, January 5 ~ Return of K-5, Saplings and Seedlings
Tuesday, January 13 ~ Hearing & Vision Screening
Monday-Friday, January 12-16 FastBridge Assessments
Monday, January 19 ~ No School, Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Tuesday, January 20 ~ School Board Meeting at 4:00

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*

Winter break is finally here! Please be sure to continue to have your child read or be read to as often as possible over the break. Students should have enough reading material with the two free books from the bookfair, as well as more books than normal checked out from the school library. Also, please take advantage of the online platforms that each classroom has. This will help to keep the mini slide (similar to the "summer slide") away. All of the educational staff thanks you!!

There was a rash of illness this week with many out with flu-like symptoms. Please be sure to read the following taken from the Student/Family Handbook:



Keep your child at home for the following conditions/reasons:

- Contagious diseases, such as chickenpox, measles or mumps.
- Skin eruptions or suspicious rashes.
- Vomiting/diarrhea, two or more episodes within 24 hours.
- Fever – 100 degrees or higher, especially if accompanied by other symptoms such as vomiting, sore throat, diarrhea, headache, stiff neck or undiagnosed rash.
- Sore throat – especially when fever or swollen glands are present. A throat culture is recommended to check for strep throat. Students with strep throat must wait 24 hours after medication has been administered before returning to school. If you choose not to medicate, the child must have a negative strep test prior to returning to school.
- Itching – persistent itching/scratching of body or scalp.
- Pink eye (conjunctivitis) – keep home if thick, crusty discharge is present and the child is uncomfortable with itchy, watery eyes.
- Appearance/behavior – child looks and acts differently; unusually pale, lacking appetite, confused or extra irritable.

Pictures from the *Elfs and the Sleigh Riders* musical, stage pictures and pictures with Santa will be posted on the school Facebook break periodically over the winter break – we hope you enjoy them!



We hope everyone has a safe and happy break! We look forward to seeing everyone back on Monday, January 5!



Many thanks to the North Shore Federal Credit Union for gifting a book per child from the Scholastic Holiday Bookfair again this year! Between Jon & Shirley Heinzen and NSFCU, Saplings and K-5 took home two free books! Thank you for supporting reading at Birch Grove Community School!



Birch Buddies ~ Board Games! afterschool program is a time for children to learn and play together!
Let's Play! <https://www.birchgroveschool.com/birch-buddies>



K/1 practices handwriting and letter formation in many ways besides pencil and paper. Gross and fine motor skills are developed through engaging and fun activities utilizing movement, music, building, textures, and much more! K/1 is growing their muscles and brains!



Birch Buddies ~ ART! afterschool program made gingerbread houses last week on Friday. Needless to say, this session was popular, and each child went home with a masterpiece of sugar!

Festive and Fun! See more pictures on the school Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/birchgrovecommunityschool>



We celebrated the last day of school in 2025 with glow sticks, candy canes, and The Grinch movie ~ not a bad way to end the day and the year!



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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www.birchgroveschool.com

School Spirit Store Link: <https://birchgrove.logosoftwear.com/> You can use GRAB15 for 15% off

Face Book: [Birch Grove Community School and Community Services #4145 | Facebook](#)



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**From Ms. Emily VanDoren**

*Seedling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service*

Our theme this week was Celebrations Around the World. We read books that showed how Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Christmas are celebrated. We were able to see different traditions and also learned new words, such as menorah and dreidel.

Fine motor skills were exercised by picking up small pom poms and placing them onto a laminated picture of a Christmas tree. This also provided an opportunity to practice counting skills and color recognition. The older Seedlings used dot markers to decorate a tree that was cut out from green construction paper. They also used markers to color a coloring sheet of a menorah and a Christmas tree. This activity provided an opportunity for the children to work on their communication skills by asking for help when they were unable to pull the marker cap off on their own. We also worked on naming the color of the marker that they were using.

We closed out our week by playing a Christmas match game on Thursday. The older Seedlings were shown a picture of an item and they had to find the matching card that was laid out on the table. This activity works on the child's communication skills, visual discrimination, and their problem-solving skills.



I hope you have a wonderful break and we will see you on January 5th!

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From Ms. Pam Holm

Sapling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service

Our theme this week, Evergreens, entailed exploring the life cycle of coniferous trees. We analyzed and compared the branches of pine, fir and spruce. We learned that evergreens keep their needles all year long. Their thin, waxy needles are specially designed to shed heavy snow so their branches don't break. We've identified common types like pines (with long needles), spruce (with short, prickly needles), and firs (with soft needles). Saplings investigated pinecones to discover how seeds are protected and spread by the wind.



Upon completing *Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree* by Robert Barry, we undertook tree size sequencing and matched the size tree to the characters in the story. Then crafted a red truck delivering a Christmas tree. To complement the story our sensory bin was stocked with different size trees to sort and alphabet letters for letter recognition. There was also a die-rolling activity with one-to-one counting, incorporating different evergreen trees. Saplings also painted Kandinsky-style pine trees.

We spent Wednesday working together on a project that involved spelling and writing our names, accomplished by stringing together colored paper lights to create a festive display.

Thursday Saplings created natural wreaths after embarking on a scavenger hunt for evergreen branches. We examined various textures and colors by utilizing organic materials such as pinecones and leaves, thereby enhancing vocabulary and creativity. We discussed the concept that a circle has no beginning or end, symbolizing the circle of life.

Throughout the week, our blue carpet was temporarily converted into an impromptu ice skating rink this week, where the Sapling placed wax paper on their feet and skated around the tree.

On Friday the Saplings will host a Pajama Day event, featuring a viewing of *The Santa Clause 2*!

Happy Holiday!

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**From Ms. Sara Knottski**

*K & 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Elementary Teacher*

Box-itects and box-eneers reported for duty this week for box-building fun! It was a fun-filled week of building castles, tunnels, delivery backpacks, dog houses, and much, much more! Students used their writing skills to brainstorm and plan our box constructions. While building, they used collaboration, patience, creativity, and imagination. We ended the week by decorating and playing with our creations.



K/1 continued to focus on learning sight words, reading with fluency, and writing this week. We are all showing growth in our reading skills during progress monitoring! In math, we played math games, practiced adding and subtracting with speed, and built shapes on a geo board!

Please have your child read and use the online resources over break! All students are capable of reading to you with the appropriate book. 20 minutes a day will make a big difference in academic growth! Have your child spend time on Lexia and IXL every day. These are great resources for proper academic work that the students are capable of doing independently.

Have a wonderful break!

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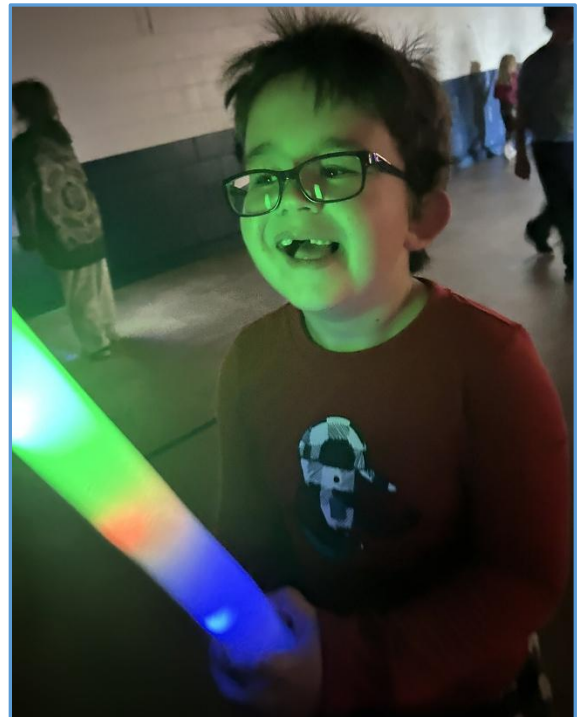
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From Ms. Samantha Forster

2nd & 3rd Grade Elementary Teacher

This week has been the week of some illness and resetting after a few weeks of mayhem. We have spent a lot of this week talking about handwashing, viruses, and how to stay healthy during this sick time. We also have practiced cleaning our room extra good to help prevent more sickness from spreading. With that, I handle schoolwork with absences and breaks by utilizing our online platforms as often as possible and encouraging independent reading. If screen time isn't for your family, writing down math problems, practicing giving change, writing letters to others in your family, or writing about their day in full sentences. Also reading HIGHER THAN grade level texts to them and explaining different vocabulary or background knowledge is a great learning exercise. All of this encourages real life examples of education and is something that they can do independently. Please reach out if you have any further questions about what your student could be doing academically over break or if you need log in information for online platforms (just do so before December 24th as I will be M.I.A in my email throughout the rest of the break to spend time with family).

Reading was spent with Venn Diagrams and how to utilize them to compare and contrast. We talked about traditions, culture, and community across all reading groups. This translated into our social studies lesson about the Minnesota Native Americans. This helped encourage students to look at the diversity within the world and within their own communities. We looked at the “EE and EA” vowel team structure and sorted words with these spelling patterns. Lastly, we continue to work through different writing structures.

Math consisted of finishing up the units that each grade was working on. This included subtraction involving money, double digit subtraction, and various graphing methods to display data. We ended the week with an assessment. Though I know where each student is individually, formal assessments serve an important role as they prepare students for standardized testing. Once we get back, we will be focusing on fine tuning all these skills.



I wish that you and your families have a safe and healthy winter break. Spending time with family and creating memories during these breaks are the student’s favorite memories and activities. Soak it all in and I will see you all in the new year!

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**From Ms. Stacy Coronis**

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

We had a very seasonal week in the 4/5 room filled with winter art activities, reading by a cozy virtual fireplace, listening to holiday music and enjoying some extra game time playing all school bingo. In reading we reviewed comprehension strategies using our online reading component, Lexia and Power Up. In math we wrapped up our division unit and will begin an algebra unit after our winter break. Several students were absent a few days this week so they will work with me after break to finish up their division math standards.

In our afternoons this past week we



enjoyed extra time for some winter themed writing and art projects. First of all we created a winter chain verse poem using the writing process of drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Students who missed this will make it up after break. In addition to the poetry, we created winter tree silhouette landscapes using oil pastels to show the effects of moonlight. It was fun exploring how light and shadowing could be shown using different colors and strokes.

Finally, our 4/5 classroom looks a little different as we head into winter break. We have a giant new interactive board to use in our math, writing, science and social studies lessons. Many thanks to Sara Silence for submitting a grant to the Cook County Library Friends in getting our classroom this amazing piece of technology. We look forward to using it daily in our learning. We also deep cleaned our classroom and rearranged our furniture to make room for our new technology. It feels good leaving for break with a clean and organized classroom. Enjoy a wonderful and well deserved holiday break with your family and friends! See you in 2026!

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