

Birch Grove Community School & Community Service Weekly Newsletter

January 23, 2026

Monday, February 2 ~ Sled Dog Visit!

Thursday, February 5 ~ K-5 Field Trip to Tettegouche State Park

Monday, February 9 ~ Dental Checks

Thursday, February 12 ~ Afternoon Valentine Celebration

Friday, February 13 ~ No School, Staff PD Day

Monday, February 16 ~ No School, President's Day/Staff PD Day

Tuesday, February 17 ~ 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*

It was a short 4-day week, with no school on Monday in observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The rest of the week we resumed our normal schedule although it included remaining inside the building all of Thursday and Friday due to the temperature.

Please remember that Birch Grove Community School will use its voice messaging system if school is ever canceled – you need not call or email the school or staff to ask, as you will be notified by a phone call and/or voice message and email. Birch Grove is an independent school from others in Lake and Cook County, and while other schools may be closed, it does not automatically mean that Birch Grove is

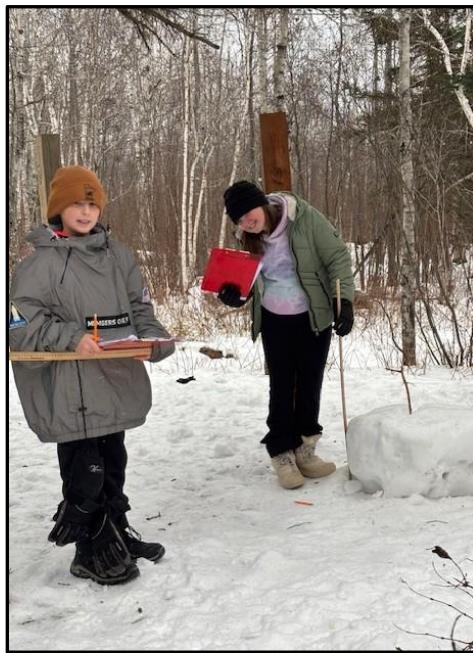


closed. Again, you will be notified of any closings by Birch Grove itself. And, as always, if there is no school for K-5 there is no Saplings or Seedlings program as well. If you have any questions, please ask. Thank you!

Ty Backlund, Cook County deputy, stopped by on Thursday to check in with Ms. Blanchette to see how things have been going at BGCS (they are going great, by the way!). Ms. Blanchette was in the gym playing dodgeball with K-5 for recess, so she invited deputy Backlund to play and he said yes! The cheers were quite loud. 😊 This is a day that students and staff will remember for a while! Thank you, Ty, for joining and making our day!



Last week, 4/5 took math outside to gather data on snowfall totals prior to the incoming snow. Each student recorded 3 specific locations and measured to the nearest quarter inch. We will remeasure our locations in 5 days and then again in 15 days. Snow much fun!!

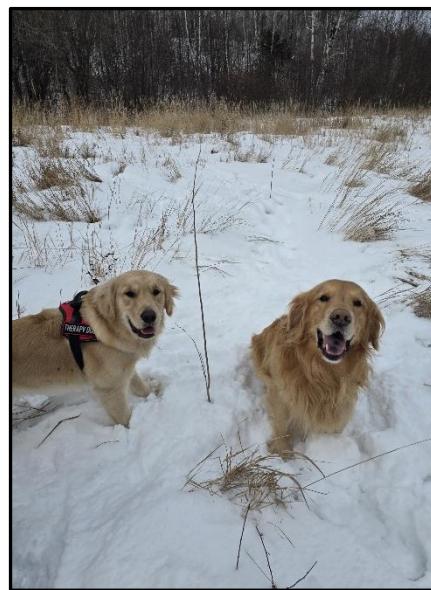


More pictures can be found on the school Facebook page.

[Facebook](#)

K-3 went snowshoeing last week for their first session of the year! A favorite spot is beyond the woods to the powerline: plenty of wide-open space to roam, fresh snow, evidence and discovery of wildlife, and high visibility (staff can easily see every student at a distance while giving them room to breathe). Everyone enjoyed the adventure, even Walter, our therapy dog in training, and his daddy, Oakley (Ms. Forster's dog). Livin' large on the North Shore!

<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/the-great-outdoors>



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the school Facebook page.

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2/3 learned about Ojibwe constellations for social studies last week. They spent time looking at the names and the Greek counterparts. They also had discussions about the stories and the importance of them within the Ojibwe culture. This was paired with read alouds and their own poster of the constellations of their choice. Students did an amazing job with this week's unit!



More pictures can be found on
the school Facebook page.

[Facebook](#)

The Saplings colored sled dog pictures, mailing to local businesses. Their mail will be carried by dog sled along the historic John Beargrease trail! The Seedlings and K-5 also took part in this trail mail project. How fun! <https://www.birchgroveschool.com/saplings-program>



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](https://www.facebook.com/Birch-Grove-Community-School-and-Community-Services-4145)



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**From Ms. Emily VanDoren**  
*Seedling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service*

Transportation was the theme of the week for Seedlings. We learned about different types of vehicles that can be found on land, on water, and in the sky. We started the week by looking at pictures of airplanes, boats, cars, and different trucks to help expand vocabulary.

During our morning reading time, we read books that had a focus on vehicles but also explored colors, shapes, and counting. *Can You Choo Choo?* by David Wojtowycz was a fun book to read to introduce not only different vehicles, but also the sounds they make and the different ways that they move. *Freight Train* by Donald Crews helped us work on our color names and recognition. We also read *Machines, Cars, Boats, and Airplanes* by Alan Snow and *Fun Trucks: Clean Up Team* by Finn Coyle. Both books introduced vehicles that the Seedlings might not be able to see in person and were a fun way to learn about the world around us.

The older Seedlings practiced their 1 to 1 correspondence, an important early math skill, by counting the number of different vehicles that were on a card. Once we counted the number of vehicles, I would show them what the number looks like to help develop their number recognition. We also worked together to put together two piece puzzles of different vehicles. The older Seedlings practiced their color recognition by completing an activity that required them to find the correct card when I would name a color. We also utilized play dough this week and drove different trucks through so that we could see what types of tracks they would make.



In honor of the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon that will be happening this weekend, we learned a little bit about sled dogs and the important role they played many years ago. I showed the Seedlings pictures of different sled dog teams and they colored a picture of their own. We also sent a special piece of trail mail to the Grand Marais State Bank, Tofte Branch. Our letter will be carried by one of the teams competing in the race before it will be sent to the recipient. Thanks to Ms. Holm for sharing this wonderful idea with the Seedlings!

Stay warm!

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**From Ms. Pam Holm**

*Sapling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service*

This week, our theme revolved around the concept of Friendship, aligning with the observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday on Monday. The Saplings participated in a writing activity, drawing inspiration from Dr. King's iconic 'I Have a Dream' speech, to articulate their aspirations for children worldwide. Our discussions and activities sought to promote an appreciation for the shared human relationships. We also discussed the essential qualities of a good friend and the value of treating others with kindness and respect.

Art this week was a rainbow of colors and skin tones as they related to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and friendships. A science experiment used eggs to represent people and display how even if we have differently-colored skin on the outside. We are all the same on the inside.

For Literacy we concentrated on M for Martin and F for friends, we worked to improve recognition of capital and lowercase letters. The Saplings carried their writing practice in the sensory writing trays. We are emphasizing the sounds of letters and introducing basic two and three letter words.

For math and manipulatives, Saplings engaged in an activity focused on counting objects. They responded to "how many?" inquiries concerning up to 20 objects arranged in a line, rectangular array, or circle, and up to 10 objects in a scattered arrangement.

Small hands change the world.

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



K/1 found the cold air temperature to be fascinating! We did a few cold-weather experiments. One that they found amazing was throwing boiling water into the air. It turns into snow! We connected that idea with the idea of why we can see our breath when it's cold. We built a frozen statue by our window with wet clothes and observed air pressure changes in a balloon! Our favorite experiment from the week was making maple syrup candy!

Another topic that was covered this week was Martin Luther King Jr. We discussed why there is a day off for him and what he did in his life that was important. They enjoyed listening to a few stories about Martin Luther King Jr.

In reading, Kindergarten practiced all of the letters of the alphabet. We said the sounds, names, and sorted letters together. We are practicing reading more and more. First grade learned about magic e and practiced reading and writing words with long I and long A. They enjoyed turning a word like cap to cape with only one letter.

In math, K/1 learned a variety of different math games. These games practice adding, subtracting, place value, and shapes. This will be added to our ever-changing math work cabinet for morning playtime and math work time.

Have a great weekend!

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**From Ms. Samantha Forster**  
*2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Elementary Teacher*

It was a cold week but students still were spent some time outside earlier in the week to get all the wiggles out! We talked a lot about why teeth chatter when we are cold, what animals do to keep warm, and about how the days are growing longer throughout this month. We completed a chart that explored the sun patterns in Tofte and another chart that focused on the sunrise and sunsets in Jamaica. This was a fun way to show students we are getting closer to summer each day! We also

started writing our very own book. Each student picked a different Minnesota animal to explore, and researched facts about these animals. They will construct sentences, write multiple drafts, revise peers, and illustrate their page. They are already talking about how they are authors and illustrators! I will be sending their work into a company to construct a book, so keep a lookout for order forms in February to order your very own book.

In reading, we completed graphic organizers to understand the different story elements of 2 different stories. We expanded this into talking about summaries and how to create an effective summary. We also explored the suffix -er and -or. Lastly, I started a word part unit that will explore different word parts and the origins. This will help students learn how to decode and produce meaning from unknown words.



In math, we focused on graphs in second grade. This involved making graphs from collecting data then comprehending the data to answer questions. Third grade focused on area and perimeter then moved into fluency with multiplication facts. This skill is essential to learning how to do more complex problems. We will be focusing on review in the next few months as we prepare for the end of the year. This will involve more small groups and repetition for students are solid in their skills before the end of the year.

Valentine's Day is coming up and I will be sending home a list for students of all the classmates. If you choose to send valentine cards/treats, please ensure each student in the classroom gets one. We will be doing an exchange on February 12th before the long weekend. Tickets for Treasure started this week and that is an opportunity for students to earn tickets to put into for drawings. Please keep your log sheets at home until the end of the year. We will count and collect logs at that time! Students can earn tickets for reading or being read to. This does include reading audio books. Reach out with any questions!

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**From Ms. Stacy Coronis**  
*4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Elementary Teacher*

This week in math we wrapped up our unit on Algebra by reading story problems that required two steps to solve. Students practiced writing a two step equation to represent the problem, and then solved for the variable using the order of operations. Towards the end of the week, we spent a few days practicing area and perimeter and next week we will begin our fractions unit.



Our story this week in reading was a historical piece of fiction that required slow and careful reading to help us comprehend. We talked about the importance of primary sources, such as the diary entries from John Adams as he crossed the Atlantic Ocean to France. While reading this story we recorded cause and effect relationships using a graphic organizer in our reading journals. Students are making great growth using the online platforms, Lexia and Power Up. Remember that your child can access this from home and use the minutes for their nightly reading and their "Tickets to Treasure" minutes.

We completed our read aloud book, Tuck Everlasting, and worked together to create a large story map with all of the plot elements. Next we practiced writing a summary of the book and compared that to the movie. We all agreed that the books we read are much better and more detailed than the movies made from them. Our spelling focus this week was longer words that contain the VCCV spelling pattern in them. Spelling checks are held on Fridays and it is wonderful if you have time during the week to quiz your child on the words and patterns.

Finally, an email was recently sent out about Valentine's Day. A paper copy of our classmates was sent home so that if your child chooses to pass out cards and/or treats that they can include everyone in class. If your child wants to make homemade cards to pass out, please let me know if you would like construction paper sent home.

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