

Birch Grove Community School & Community Service Weekly Newsletter

September 17, 2026

Monday-Friday, September 14 -18 ~ K-5 FastBridge Assessments

Tuesday, September 15 ~ School Board Meeting at 4:00

Wednesday, September 16 ~ VOA-MN School Authorizer Onsite Fall Visit

Tuesday, September 22 ~ DNR Field Day at Birch Grove for 4th & 5th Grade

Thursday, September 24 ~ School Picture Day

Monday, September 28 ~ K-5 Painting By the Lake with Mary

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

Week two of the new school year almost done and things are going really well! You will find some repeat information in this newsletter, as it bears repeating, especially the basic info about dropping off/picking up, bus passes, lunch, attendance and sleep. There is new information also, so be sure to read. Should you have any questions, please let us know. Thank you!

BGCS will strive to give every child what they need to make significant growth throughout the year, but we will need your help to do it. Please communicate with your child's teacher, encourage and support your child with any homework they may have (there shouldn't be much), use time at home to promote learning, see to it that your child is read to or reads independently at home, and make sure your child knows you think school is important. These are just a few things that you can do to promote growth. The



educational staff will have other ideas and resources for you throughout the year. Please never hesitate to contact us if you have questions, concerns or ideas.

The front entry doors open at 7:55am and close at 8:10am. If you arrive before 7:55 please wait in vehicles for the front building doors to open. If you see other children entering the building, it is because they are employee children, or the children are enrolled in one of the two daycares, Saplings or Seedlings. If you arrive after 8:10, please ring the bell for entry. All K-5 students are able to walk themselves into the building – we’ve got this! At the end of the school day, you may pick your K-5 or Sapling up between **3:00-3:15 by the pavilion.**

Newsletters will be emailed each week, usually on Thursdays (sometimes Fridays if it is really busy around here!). Newsletters will be emailed to the address that you indicated on enrollment forms. If you would like to add an email address to the newsletter email group, please let us know by emailing birchgrove@boreal.org Newsletters are also posted on our school website at www.birchgroveschool.com

Be sure to check out our website at www.birchgroveschool.com. You can find the school year calendar, weekly newsletters, lunch menus, school board minutes, upcoming events, resources, and more. I hope that you will be a regular visitor to our site.

Facebook:

Be sure to “Like” and “Follow” our school Facebook page, and be sure to share with others! We post regularly – it can help to keep you up to date with events and activities! [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/birchgrovecommunityschool/)
<https://www.facebook.com/birchgrovecommunityschool/>

Each Sapling and K-5 student has been given a Take Home Folder. Please check this folder daily. Use this folder as one form of communication with your child’s teacher. You can return forms and paperwork, send bus passes, etc. **Take Home Folders are checked every day – backpacks are not!**

Bus passes – if you have a change in your child’s normal busing, please send a written note. For instance, if your child is being picked up by someone and not riding the bus home, please send a note, email, or call. If your child is getting off at a different scheduled bus stop than normal, please send a note – the different stop needs to be on the route. Email will also work, but send it to both me and your child’s teacher in the event that one of us is absent. Also, emails should be sent well before the end of the day so that they are sure to be opened. If you decide to come to Birch Grove and pick your child up instead of having your child ride the bus home, you don’t need to email or call to let us know, you can just show up. If you want to do this, you just need to wait for your child to come out and pick them up at the pavilion between 3:00-3:15 and let your child’s teacher know you are there. Buses leave at 3:15, so just be there before that. Thank you!

Hot lunch is served on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. We do not have hot lunch on Wednesdays so that Senior Lunch can happen, as it has for decades in the BG building. We appreciate you sending a lunch from home on Wednesdays. For now, please do not send anything that needs to be heated, as we will be eating outside on Wednesdays as much as possible and microwaves are not available outside. In November(ish), when we start Lantern Lunch on Wednesdays (inside the building), microwaves will be available at that time. Looking forward to Lantern Lunch!

Please send a backup lunch to be kept at school for the inevitable day that one is forgotten at home or on the bus. Backup lunches will be kept in student lockers. Non-perishables foods should be used for backup lunches.

My Opinion Piece! 😊

In my experience, a good portion of the children that have a “bad day”, “melt down”, make poor choices, refuse or have a hard time focusing on their work, or end up in the school office to see me for challenging behaviors, **ARE TIRED.** In my opinion, if all of the children that came to school were well rested each and every school day, I believe that it would cut down on at least 50% (maybe more) of challenging behaviors, and would increase the percentage and gains of academic growth across the board.

I have included a few sleep charts below. All children are different – your child might require more/less sleep than what you see below.

Average Sleep Needs	
Age	Hours
Newborns (0-2 months)	12 - 18
Infants (3 months to 1 year)	14 - 15
Toddlers (1 to 3 years)	12 - 14
Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)	11 - 13
School-aged children (5 to 12 years)	10 - 11
Teens and preteens (12 to 18 years)	8.5 - 10
Adults (18+)	7.5 - 9



At what time should your child go to bed?							
Age	Wake-up time						
	6:00 AM	6:15 AM	6:30 AM	6:45 AM	7:00 AM	7:15 AM	7:30 AM
	Sleeping time						
5	6:45 PM	7:00 PM	7:15 PM	7:30 PM	7:30 PM	8:00 PM	8:15 PM
6	7:00 PM	7:15 PM	7:30 PM	7:30 PM	8:00 PM	8:15 PM	8:30 PM
7	7:15 PM	7:15 PM	7:30 PM	8:00 PM	8:15 PM	8:30 PM	8:45 PM
8	19:30	7:30 PM	8:00 PM	8:15 PM	8:30 PM	8:45 PM	9:00 PM
9	7:30 PM	8:00 PM	8:15 PM	8:30 PM	8:45 PM	9:00 PM	9:15 PM
10	8:00 PM	8:15 PM	8:30 PM	8:45 PM	9:00 PM	9:15 PM	9:30 PM
11	8:15 PM	8:30 PM	8:45 PM	9:00 PM	9:15 PM	9:30 PM	9:45 PM
12	8:15 PM	8:30 PM	8:45 PM	9:00 PM	9:15 PM	9:30 PM	9:45 PM

Good Attendance is Necessary for Learning!

We understand that families sometimes take vacations, have family emergencies, special people may come up north to visit, or families may go out of town early for special events, etc., and some families may pull their students from school on these days. Please keep in mind that your child could (and most likely will) get sick later in the school year and may be absent for a number of days, adding to the total number of absences that were not illness related. Please plan for your child to be sick **5-10** days in the school year, and consider this when pulling your child from school for other reasons. We are required by law to report excessive truancy/excessive absences whether excused or unexcused, to the appropriate agencies, and no one wants that. Should your child's absences become concerning, we will always reach out to you first. If you have any questions, please let us know.

Please send your child to school in layers. We go outside everyday in all but the worst weather! Children can leave a sweatshirt/jacket here at school so that they will always have it and it is not forgotten at home.

K-5 walked to Tofte Park last week Friday on a moody day! It was the first week of school and everyone deserved a little bit of Lake Superior! <https://www.birchgroveschool.com/>



More pictures can be found on the school Facebook page.

[Facebook](#)

The cozy scent of pumpkin spice filled the Saplings room as our little chefs rolled up their sleeves to bake delicious pumpkin chocolate chip waffles! Baking isn't just about the delicious end result; it is packed with sneakily educational moments! Here is what our little chefs learned while they baked:

👐 Math & Measurement: Counting out scoops of pumpkin mix and measuring ingredients.

👉 Fine Motor Skills: Strengthening little hand muscles by stirring thick batter.

👂 Sensory Exploration: Discussing the rich autumnal colors, the sticky texture of the puree, and the warm aroma of fall spices.

🕒 Patience & Science: Watching the liquid batter transform into fluffy, warm waffles!

We love bringing these hands-on, sensory experiences into the classroom to make learning tangible and fun! <https://www.birchgroveschool.com/saplings-program>

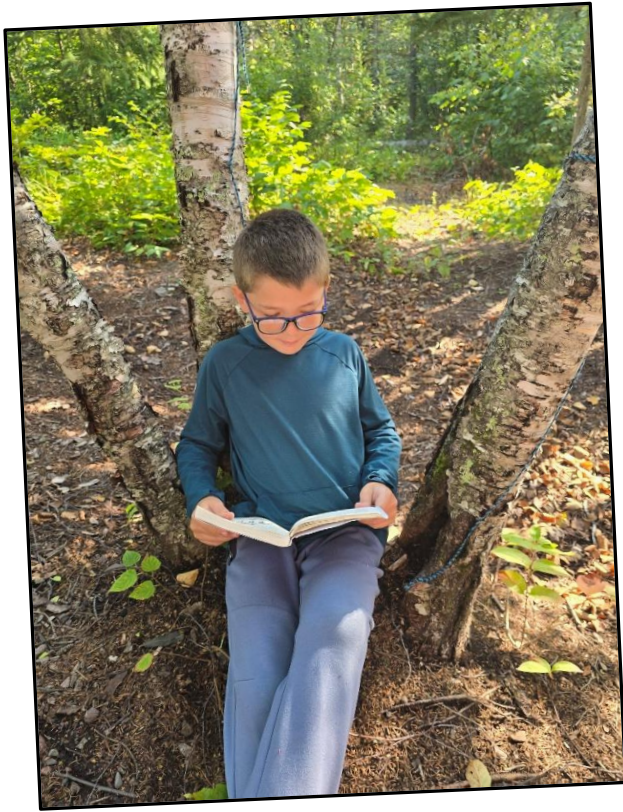


2/3 spent a wonderful afternoon painting some mushrooms and fall colored backgrounds this week. They looked at fall fruits and vegetables to inspire their background, created mushrooms with different shading techniques, and then placed them onto their paper. Though this project was so much fun, students were able to practice gluing and scissor expectations, learning outdoor learning rules, learning how to follow multi-step directions and how to explore their creativity with an objective. The best part? They didn't even realize they were learning these vital back to school routines, they just saw fun! A sweat bee decided to hang around with us and all students took turns saying "Hi!"



Reading is always important at Birch Grove, but getting to read in the morning at the Campsite is a special experience. Birdsong and books just go together!

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



More pictures can be found on the school Facebook page.

[Facebook](#)

26-27 school pictures with Bruce Johnson Photography are scheduled for Thursday, September 24. Pictures include "regular" and "silly"! Order forms will be sent home prior to picture day. All students have their picture taken, even if families don't place an order. Everyone say "CHEESE"!



All Saplings and K-5 will have their picture taken even if an order has not been placed.
Order forms will be sent home soon.

👟 🌲 Birch Buddies~HIKE! After School Program! 🌲 👟

There's something special about getting outside, slowing down, and enjoying the beauty around us.
Our Birch Buddies Hiking Club is about so much more than just hiking!

We're making memories, finding a little calm in the woods and by the water, learning about nature,
exploring new places, and building friendships along the way. ❤️

Watching the kids laugh, explore, ask questions, and simply enjoy being outside together is what
Birch Buddies is all about. These are the moments and memories we hope they carry with them for
years to come.

- 🌲 Fresh air.
- 💧 Time by the water.
- 👟 New adventures.
- 👫 Growing friendships.
- ❤️ Memories being made.

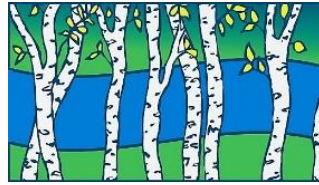
Adventure is better with buddies! <https://www.birchgroveschool.com/birch-buddies>



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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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**

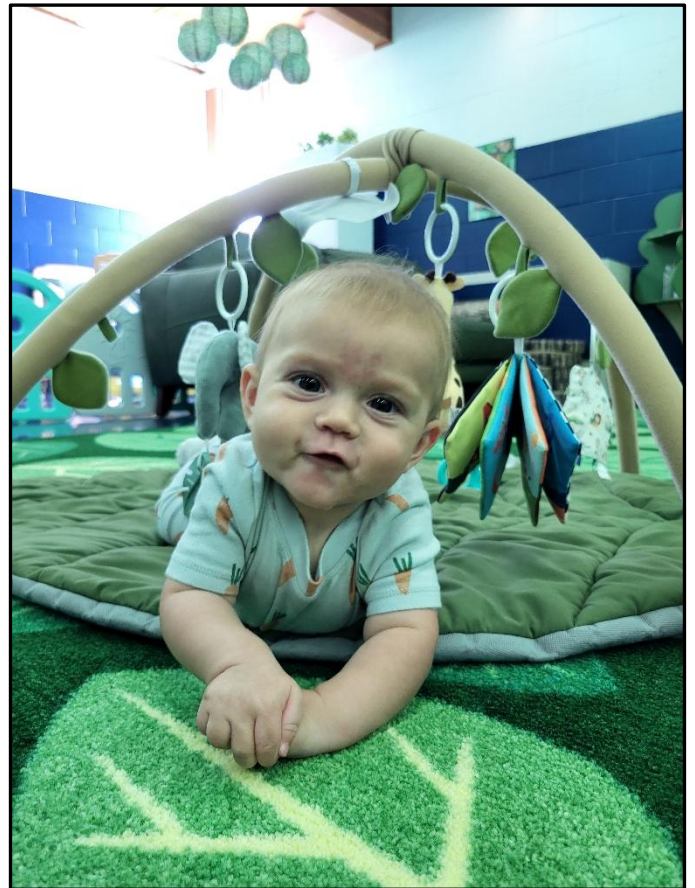
*Seedling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service*

This week the Seedlings learned about facial features. During our morning circle time we read books that helped us learn about our facial features and what each one is used for. We also read books that showed the Seedlings how everyone has their own unique features. We sang "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" to help reinforce our learning this week. Once we finished singing, we took turns looking into a mirror so the Seedlings could see their facial features and we talked about their eye and hair colors.

Our sensory table became a "discovery" table that was filled with picture cutouts of various people to introduce the Seedlings to new and unfamiliar faces. There were also small plastic figures that were used to represent our families. The Seedlings enjoyed bringing "mom" and "dad" around the room to play.

The Seedlings had their choice of face pictures to color and we spent time talking about the different features they were coloring and the colors that they were using. We also used play dough to create faces.

This activity worked their fine motor muscles which are important to prepare them for writing.



We continue to spend time outside each day as the weather allows. One of the Seedlings favorite activities outside is to play in the sand box. Please make sure that spare clothes are replaced as they are sent home.

Have a great weekend!

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From Ms. Pam Holm

Sapling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service

This week, Saplings observed the chromatic season of fall. They examined the captivating world of autumn leaves, explored the reasons behind the change in leaf colors and their eventual fall from trees during autumn, while acquiring knowledge about chlorophyll. Saplings spent Monday creating vibrant stained glass maple leaves in rich red and bold orange, focusing on enhancing their fine motor dexterity.

On Tuesday, the Saplings celebrated International Dot Day by reading *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds. This inspiring story shows how a caring teacher helps a doubting student find her creative voice. The book's message of self-expression sparked wonderful connection and collaboration among the students. To celebrate making their own "mark," each Sapling used Q-tips and paint to create beautiful autumn trees.

Saplings used crayons and paper on Wednesday to produce leaf art by placing leaves underneath and rubbing sideways, thereby exposing the unique shapes and patterns of each leaf. Saplings dove into fall with a beautiful autumn sensory bin! Filled with colorful leaves, acorns, and pinecones, they used scoops and cups to explore different textures. With the aid of magnifying glasses, they analyzed the leaves' vein structures that carry food/water throughout the leaf. As they sorted and counted their treasures, they practiced early math and measurement skills. Best of all, the activity was a wonderful way for them to practice sharing, cooperating, and playing together as a team.



The cozy scent of pumpkin spice filled the Saplings room this Thursday as our little chefs baked delicious pumpkin chocolate chip waffles. But baking isn't just about the tasty treats – it's packed

with sneakily educational moments! From mathematical thinking while measuring to fine motor control while pouring, a single scoop of batter sparked incredible cognitive growth.

Friday Saplings employed real, life-size leaves and seeds to craft the leaf characters and landscapes, positioning them against textured paper backgrounds, in a style similar to Lois Ehlert's *Leaf Man*.

This week's literacy focus centered on exploring letters L and F within the context of the leaf and fall theme. In the library center, Saplings utilized props from *There was an Old Lady who Swallowed a Leaf* to retell the story, honing their sequencing skills. The writing center featured pre-writing mats, vocabulary words and letter recognition cards to accompany the story.

Mathematical concepts were integrated this week through leaf sorting and classification exercises. While the math and manipulatives center featured leaf counting and graphing, leaf sequence sizing and sorting, shadow matching, fall number puzzles, and a build-your-own scarecrow activity.

They have been immersing themselves in friendships, playful learning and personal growth!

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**From Ms. Sara Knottski**

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

We are working hard in K/1st grade! We started math and reading groups this week. Students are working at different stations during math and reading times. We are also working on a poster called "All About Me." The students drew and wrote about their family, themselves, and their favorite things. Check out the posters that will be hanging in the hall all year.

This week, Kindergarteners were introduced to the letters C and O. We are learning the procedure for how we are going to learn new letters throughout the year. The students have been writing C, saying the C sound, and talking and reading about words that start with C. Kindergarten will be building their alphabet knowledge as the weeks go on. 1<sup>st</sup> grade reviewed letter sounds as they focused on reading and writing. We blended sounds, worked on spelling, and practiced reading words with short vowels. The 1<sup>st</sup> graders are loving reading decodable books.

In math, we are learning to write and recognize numbers. 1<sup>st</sup> grade is reviewing how to write numbers and counting up to 120. They are also learning about



partners of 5, such as 3 and 2. Kindergarten students learned how to write, recognize, and count numbers 0, 1, 2, and 3. Ask them to write these numbers at home, and see if they remember!

This week, K/1 came up with rules for our classroom. We decide that we should be kind, safe, listen, keep our body to ourself, and take care of our things. We return to these rules often throughout the school year to remind us what we are doing and how we treat others is important!

Reminders: Please send students with emergency clothes and a backup lunch to keep in their lockers. We do have a snack twice a day. Please send something healthy (especially on hot lunch days!)

As always, feel free to contact me by phone, email, or in person if you have any questions!

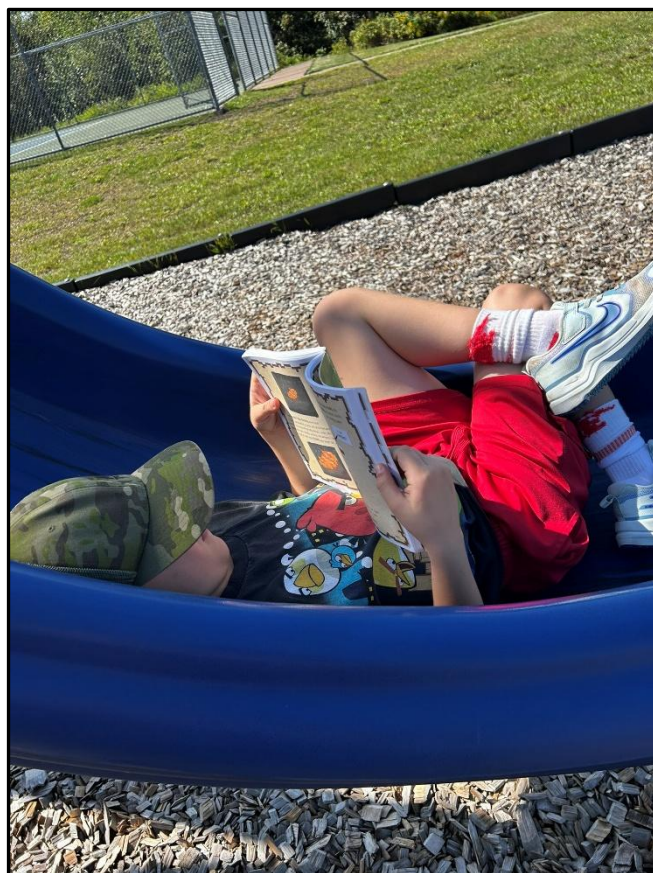
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From Ms. Samantha Forster

2nd & 3rd Grade Elementary Teacher

This weekend has a great start to our fall weather. We had lots of testing to do this week as well as teaching our last few routines and expectations. This looked like how do we participate in whole group activities, how we get our teachers attention, and how group rotations are expected to run. My class has a great memory from last year so we were able to get through our things quickly. We also spent some time looking at plant life cycles and playing a fun card game after a lesson on pollination. During math, our focus was on repeated addition, equal groups, and arrays with the relation to multiplication. This will be our introduction to memorizing our multiplication facts which a foundational skill as students start to move up into math. I wanted to focus on some fall art so we created mushrooms to hang around our classroom. We used watercolor and different techniques to add dimensions to them. Lastly, we ended our week with a special treat by the campfire and playing in the woods. It was a wonderful second week!



Thank you everyone for your attentiveness. Every student has been arriving with what they need each day. Please reach out with any questions or concerns. Check the school calendar as we have pictures and some other fun activities planned for September!

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**From Ms. Stacy Coronis**

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

The 4/5 class spent a lot of time outside this past week when we weren't reviewing procedures, practicing routines or taking our fall FastBridge assessments. It was just too darn nice to stay inside!

All students took their math and reading fall assessments this week and this information will help them be placed in the reading and math groups that are the best fit for their level. These groups are flexible and may change throughout the year. Students learned how to work on their morning math work, completed their baseline math facts and set up all of their supplies for the year. In writing we completed a Bio Poem as well as our Four Square Favorites writing and art project. We kicked off our social studies unit by reviewing the 7 continents, 5 oceans, hemispheres and then created a world and US map to use as reference for the school year.

A highlight of our week was getting into the brand new library for our daily reading which made us feel like we were reading in a castle with a knight in armor watching over us!! It was so cool! The floating candles gave us serious Harry Potter vibes and we LOVED the cozy feel of the room.



**Next week all 4/5 students will participate in the DNR Field Day which will take place outside all day!** Students from all over Cook County will come to Birch Grove and the students will all visit 7 stations to learn about environmental educational topics such as fisheries, land erosion, insect migration, and many other life science topics. It is a great day of learning outdoors and students should be dressed to be outside all day! Thursday we will have our Birch Grove Picture Day!

I absolutely love how our classroom is coming together. 5th graders have been such positive role models for the 4th graders and the 4th graders are rising to meet the expectations of being in the "big kid" room. It is going to be a wonderful year together!

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