

Grievance settled, town of Gilford admits procedural error

By **THOMAS P. CALDWELL**
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

GILFORD — A health insurance grievance filed over a misreading of contract language between the town of Gilford and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 534 was settled in the town's favor earlier this month, but the town acknowledged that it had not followed proper procedures in handling the matter.

Selectmen on Sept. 12 agreed to notify the union that it would comply with all grievance procedures in the future.

The dispute arose around a provision of the contact with Department of Public Works employees that discontinued one health plan option as of July 1. Although it was included as part of the negotiated contract, when the town announced the end of that plan, the union

claimed it was a violation and filed an official grievance.

Town Administrator Scott Dunn denied the grievance, reminding the union that elimination of the plan had been a primary objective of the selectmen during negotiations, as it would save the town an estimated \$8,781 for the final six months of the year. The town agreed to increase incentives for employees after the negotiations had concluded.

In settling the grievance on Sept. 5, the town acknowledged that the first step in responding to a grievance calls for the public works director to make that decision, rather than the town administrator.

Dunn said he had issued the denial because Public Works Director Jason Hayden was new to the department at the time. Dunn had served as acting public works director while the vacancy existed.

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Children thrive in the right preschool

By **LISA HOLIDAY**
LACONIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

As young children grow, every experience or encounter presents a learning opportunity. They learn from the things they try to do, see, hear, smell and taste. Their young brains grow quickly, with 90 percent of their brain development occurring by age 5. Parents, family members and other caregivers are a young child's first teacher and can support a child's brain growth in many helpful ways.

One of these important ways is through play. Play is more than just fun, it

is serious learning. A child's play time assists them in learning new skills and interests. In addition, it strengthens their communication and builds self-confidence. Taking the time to play with your child not only brings joy but also has the ability to strengthen family bonds.

Other ways to support early childhood experiences include talking, reading and singing with young children from the day they are born. Ask them questions to get them thinking and use words to help your child understand feelings. Tell your child what he or she does well. Allow your child the chance to do things by herself or himself and remain calm when your child is upset. Limit your child's access to screen time and provide your child with opportunities for physical activity such as jumping, running, climbing, throwing and balancing. Families are instrumental in their child's growth and development.

Another helpful building block to supporting a child's growth is participating in a quality preschool program. Early childhood education can have many short- and long-term benefits including social,

emotional and academic ones. Young children are naturally curious and preschool allows them to find answers to their questions through exploring, experimenting and talking with their teachers and peers. Early childhood educators are trained in identifying areas where support is needed for each child and building programs and activities around these. Preschool promotes learning

through play and discovery while inspiring creativity and enhancing independence. But don't just take

my word for it, here are some of the comments directly from our preschoolers at the Laconia Preschool program. "I am comfortable." "I have so much fun!" "I like the toys." "I can't wait to learn letters." "I like going outside."

Many children will thrive in the right preschool program. Finding the option that will work best for your child depends on a variety of factors, such as your child's age and personality, your family's finances, values and priorities. Fortunately, throughout the Lakes Region and Laconia specifically, there are a variety of preschool options from the public-school system, federally sponsored preschools and private programs.

To learn more about supporting early childhood and to find resources, check out the Spark NH website at www.sparknh.com. Spark NH is an early childhood advisory council created to promote a comprehensive system of early childhood programs and services in New Hampshire.

Lisa Holiday is the Laconia School District's student services administrator for early childhood/middle school.

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