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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 10, 2015

Gov. Shumlin Announces Promise Community Initiative to Focus on Early Childhood

MONTPELIER – Gov. Peter Shumlin today launched the Promise Community initiative, which will coordinate services across education, health care, private, public, and community sectors to create an all-of-the-above, comprehensive approach to transform the lives of children with high needs. Communities around Vermont can now begin applying to be one of these Promise Communities, which are modeled after the successful Harlem Children’s Zone in New York City.

Governor Shumlin said, “This new initiative is a great opportunity for Vermont to move the needle on outcomes for children and families in rural communities. Vermont is one of the top states in America when it comes to taking care of young children, and we need to make sure that that’s the case in every village and town. It is our shared duty to help children thrive and grow up to contribute to a vibrant economic future for our state.”

A community participating in the initiative commits to a two-year process. In year one, Promise Community coaches will facilitate the development of each community’s Promise Community Roadmap, which includes compiling a community needs assessment and creating an action plan to improve outcomes for children and families. Once the action plan is in place, financial support – consisting of grants up to \$200,000 – will be given to the community to support implementation efforts. The coaches will remain in the community during year two, providing technical assistance to move forward with the plan. An evaluator will continue to monitor long-term outcomes for the community.

A Promise Community is identified by a coalition of people who are committed to serve the young children birth to age six who live in the catchment area of the local public school. This coalition must include the local Building Bright Futures regional coordinator, school principal and superintendent, Agency of Human Services Field director, and a child health care provider; it is encouraged to include: families, town planners, recreation and arts organizations, libraries, faith based organizations, local law enforcement, the business community, and others. More than one school can collaborate and communities can cross Supervisory Unions. This can include more than one elementary public school, because Promise Communities must reach at least 40 children.

Applications for interested communities are due March 18, 2015. Six communities will be selected for the first cohort from different regions of the state. A group of the Promise

Community statewide stakeholder team will review and score applications to determine the first Cohort. The application committee will consider community need, community will, and community impact in making their decision.

Promise Communities Director Julianne Nickerson explains further, “Community need will be determined by looking at data around poverty, kindergarten readiness and third grade achievement, as well as access to high quality child care. Will is demonstrated by a broad array of committed community partners and a plan to bring non-traditional partners and families to the table. Impact is about the difference communities plan to make in the lives of children and families and the number of children from birth to age 6 that will be affected.”

The Agency of Human Services Child Development Division will be hosting a webinar on February 18, 2015 to offer further information about the application process and answer additional questions.

“Vermont has a strong range of programs and services to support children and families,” says Agency of Human Services Secretary Hal Cohen, “but delivery may not be consistent or reach children with high needs and their families in every community. Barriers like limited transportation, inter-generational poverty, inadequate affordable housing, and lack of local employment opportunities inhibit access to the robust array of integrated services that help create success for children. The Promise Communities initiative will leverage the state and local resources in order to improve outcomes for young children in our highest need, rural communities.”

The Promise Communities initiative is a project of Vermont’s Early Learning Challenge – Race to the Top Grant, a \$36.9 million, federally funded, four-year grant to help build a high-quality and accessible early childhood system in the state so that all young children will be ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

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