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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 24, 2014

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Enrollment Opens for Statewide Initiative to Connect Youth and Families with Support to Succeed in Workforce, Achieve Independence as Adults

Leaders from Walker Administration, Public Instruction announce push to enroll hundreds of youth and families for \$32.5 million, 5-year grant initiative

MILWAUKEE – Top leaders from four state agencies gathered today at Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee to encourage youths with special needs and their families to sign up for potential enrollment in the Wisconsin PROMISE initiative. Wisconsin PROMISE is a five-year, \$32.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education that provides services to youth and their families who receive Social Security disability benefits (SSI), with the goal of helping them achieve employment as adults.

"Around the state, eligible youth and families will be receiving letters introducing them to PROMISE," said Reggie Newson, Secretary of the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), whose Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is leading implementation. "Families are urged to reach out to their local Wisconsin PROMISE Intake Coordinators (PICs) to learn more about what PROMISE offers them and assist with the enrollment into the initiative."

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs awarded Wisconsin the Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) Grant. The grant seeks to increase the education, career, and income outcomes of children with special needs receiving federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and their families.

On Secretary Newson's behalf, Deputy Secretary Jonathan Barry joined state Department of Health Services (DHS) Secretary Kitty Rhoades, Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Eloise Anderson, and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers for today's announcement at Boys & Girls Clubs, which is a partnering agency in the initiative.

The Departments of Health Services and Children and Families also assisted in writing a successful grant application for Wisconsin. Their interactions with youth and families through Medicaid programs in DHS and W-2 and foster programs in DCF will allow Wisconsin to provide comprehensive services to PROMISE enrollees and their families that will assist them creating a path for their families that will reduce poverty.

DHS Secretary Rhoades said, "Wisconsin PROMISE is just that—a promise to remove the barriers that prevent youth with challenges from finding a job. By working together, coordinating our services, and creating systems to get these youth ready to enter the workforce, Wisconsin will be adding some of the most talented, hardworking, and appreciative people to our labor pool."

"Foster youth who are emancipated at age eighteen have no family to help guide them in their early adulthood," said DCF Secretary Anderson. "While nothing can ever replace a family, the Wisconsin PROMISE is a step in the right direction towards bettering their chances of becoming successful adults."

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The Department of Public Instruction (DPI), led by State Superintendent Evers, is playing a major role in setting up the grant's enrollment system, to ensure students and families know how to enroll in PROMISE. DPI will also ensure that grant activities are coordinated with the ongoing work of educators to help students with disabilities graduate with the skills to succeed.

State Superintendent Evers said, "Our work as a proud partner on the Wisconsin PROMISE grant goes hand in hand with our mission of preparing every child for college and career. This includes ensuring that every student with a disability has a postsecondary transition plan preparing them for life after graduation, as well as expanding opportunities to gain job skills and postsecondary training while in high school."

A total of 2,000 youth (between the ages of 14-16) receiving SSI and their families will be enrolled for possible participation in PROMISE grant-supported activities. Wisconsin PROMISE Intake Coordinators (PICs) located around the state will be available to assist them with the enrollment process. To meet the federal requirements for the grant, half of the enrollees will go into the PROMISE Grant program, and the other 1,000 will be enrolled for traditional programs in DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).

The Boys and Girls Clubs represents one of many agencies partnering with the Wisconsin PROMISE initiative.

"At Boys & Girls Clubs we are always looking for new ways to meet the diverse needs of the kids we serve, and we welcome partnerships that will help provide positive outcomes for our members," said Vincent Lyles, President and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee. "We look forward to working with the state through the Wisconsin PROMISE grant to ensure more kids have access to a promising future."

Governor Scott Walker announced that Wisconsin was awarded a PROMISE grant in September 2013. Along with Wisconsin, PROMISE grants were awarded to California, New York, Maryland, Arkansas, and a consortium of states that includes Utah, Arizona, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana.

In Wisconsin, other collaborating agencies include the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, UW Stout, Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation, Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board, Employment Resources Incorporated, UW Madison, WI FACETS, and CESA 12.

For more about Wisconsin PROMISE including how to enroll, visit <http://promisewi.com/>