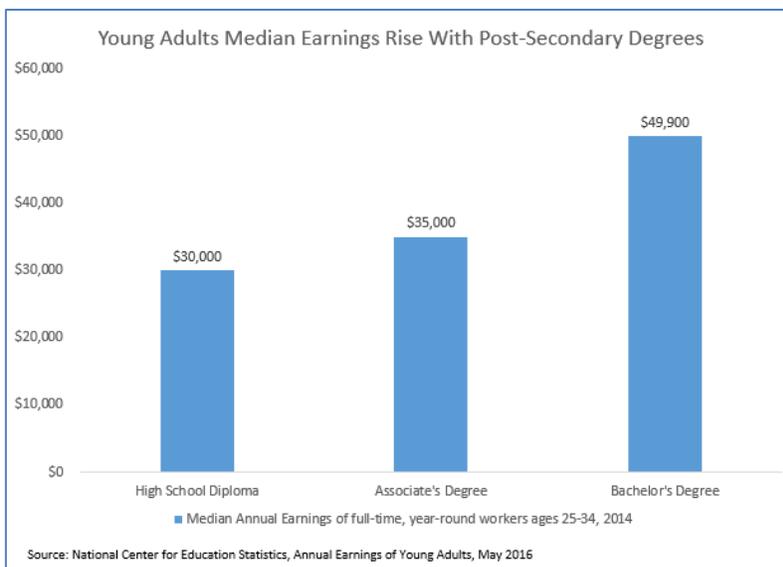
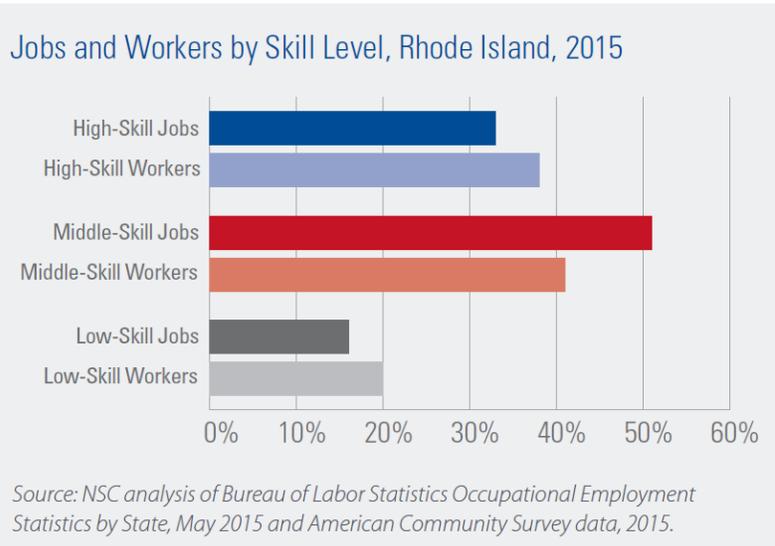




Testimony Re: H- 5175, Article 3
House Finance Committee
March 15, 2017

We are pleased to see the Governor’s proposed policy and investment to help ensure more Rhode Islanders are able to attain an Associate’s degree at CCRI and complete a Bachelor’s degree at RIC or URI. The Economic Progress Institute has long advocated for the state to take steps to ensure that all our residents have the opportunity to attain at least two-years post-secondary education, credential or training so they can meet the demand for the middle-skill jobs in our state.

As highlighted by the analysis by National Skills Coalition, Rhode Island, like all states, has a gap between the number of middle-skill jobs (51%) and the workers trained to a middle-skill level (41%).ⁱ The demand for middle-skill jobs will remain strong, comprising 47% of job openings between 2014 and 2024. Providing opportunity for more Rhode Islanders to attain an Associate’s degree by removing financial barriers as proposed by the Governor, coupled with efforts at CCRI to improve completion rates will help close the gap.



Of course policies and investments that help more Rhode Islanders attain a Bachelor’s degree are also important both to the economic security of workers as well as to help expand the higher-skilled job sector. Data from the National Center for Education Statisticsⁱⁱ shows the value of increasing educational attainment on earnings for young adults (age 25-34): Those with a high school diploma have median annual earnings of \$30,000; with an associate’s degree earnings rise to \$35,000 and to \$49,900 for those with a bachelor’s degree.

Improving opportunities for our high school graduates to continue their education is an important part of what should be a comprehensive approach to ensuring more Rhode Islanders can attain economic security and employers have the skilled workforce they need to compete in the national and global economies. A comprehensive approach includes expanding early learning opportunities for children through expanding pre-K and child care (areas that have also seen investments over the past few years); ensuring high quality K-12 schools that meet the diverse needs of all students; and providing more opportunities for the current adult workforce to improve their skills and earnings capacity, such as ending the waiting list for adults anxious to improve their English language skills.

ⁱ National Skills Coalition, 2017 Middle Skills Fact Sheet, Rhode Island

(<http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/2017-middle-skills-fact-sheets/file/Rhode-Island-MiddleSkills.pdf>)

ⁱⁱ National Center for Education Statistics, (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cba.asp)