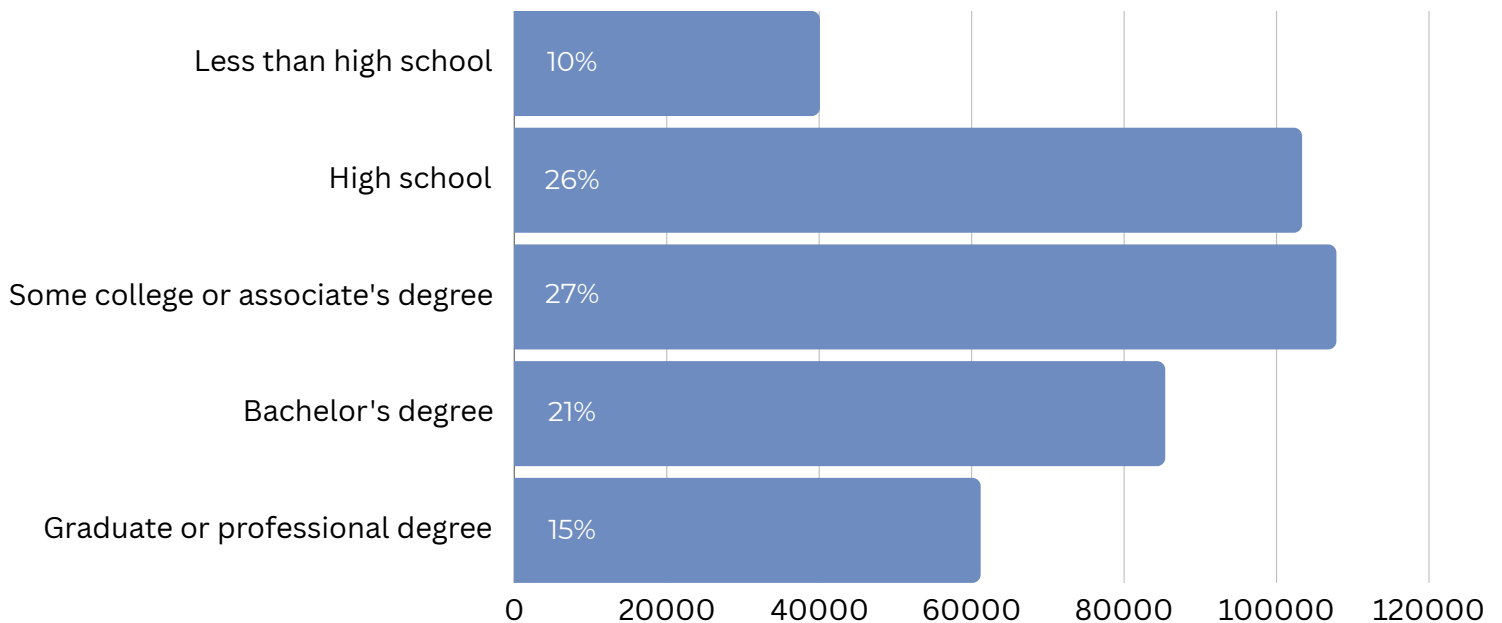


EDUCATION

The Rhode Island Women's Well-Being Index provides access to publicly available data specific to local, regional and statewide levels, and aggregated for gender and race, when such data is available. Based on similar indexes used by other Women's Funds, the RI Index encompasses five dimensions--Education, Economic Security, Health & Safety, Housing, and Civic Engagement--each of which is made up of additional indicators. This policy brief explores the latest data for the Education Indicator.

In Rhode Island, 27% of women aged 25+ (all races) have at least some college education. Almost 90% of women across Rhode Island have at least a high school diploma.



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

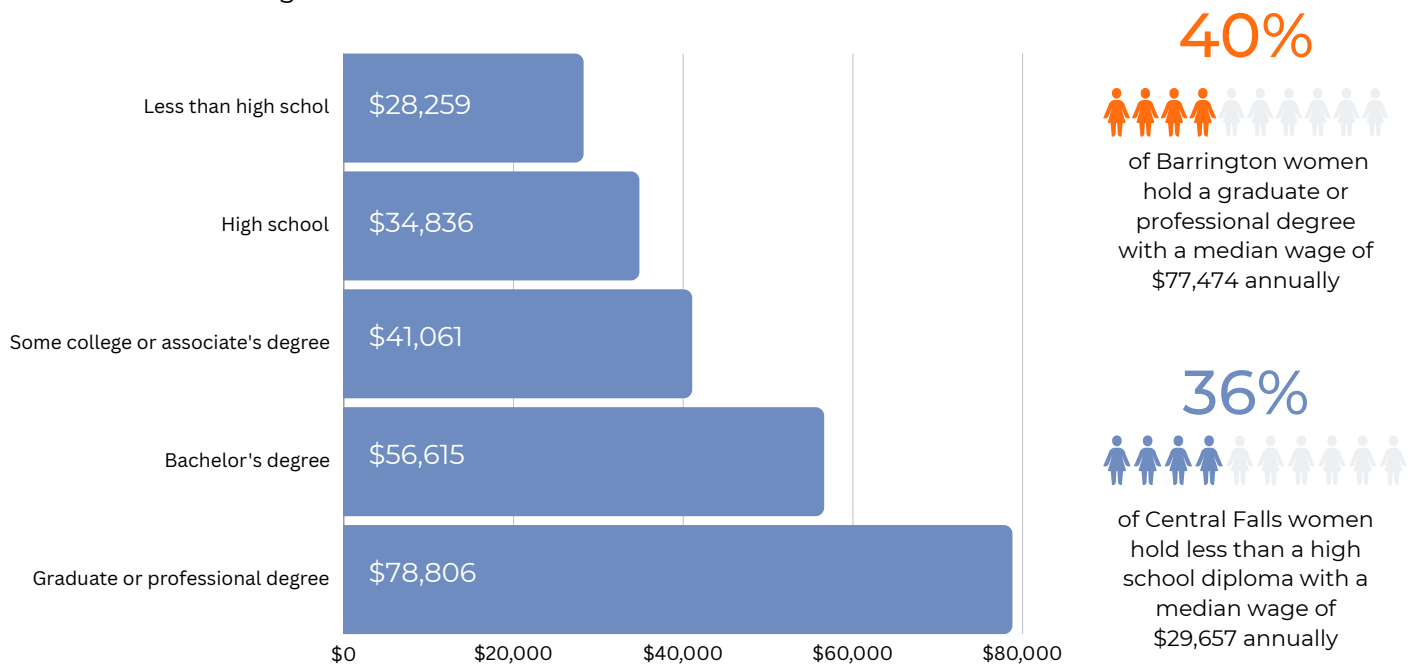
It's critically important to Rhode Island's economic future that the Rhode Island workforce- both women and men- have the formal education and training necessary to engage fully in today's competitive economy. The good news is that RI has increased the percentage of women achieving at least a high school diploma (up six percent since 2016). Indeed, we saw a 1% drop in women with less than a high school diploma and conversely, a 1% increase in women achieving a graduate or professional degree this year over last. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that the COVID pandemic has led to historic drops in the number of students attending college and it is likely we will see our gains in higher levels of education erode over the next few years.

We know that median earnings significantly increase for women with educational attainment. Enabling women to achieve their full potential builds strong families and a growing economy. For that reason, it is not surprising to see higher levels of educational attainment in wealthier areas of Rhode Island: In Barrington, 40% of women have a graduate or other professional degree; East Greenwich comes in next with 35%, followed by Jamestown at 31%, South Kingstown at 29%, and Narragansett at 27%.

Conversely, earnings significantly decrease for those with lower levels of educational attainment. As we might expect, areas of the state which experience higher levels of poverty correspond with lower rates of educational attainment. Central Falls scored lowest among cities and towns on educational attainment, with nearly one in four women holding less than a high school diploma, which increased significantly from our last report at a rate of 24% to 36%. Woonsocket improved by 3% to join Providence and Pawtucket with 17% of its female population not graduating from high school. Exeter was not far behind with a rate of 16%.

Median Earnings of Women by Educational Attainment

Median earnings for women increase with educational attainment.



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates, table B20004

Statewide, the median earnings for a woman with less than a high school degree is \$28,259 per year, while a woman with a graduate or other professional degree can expect to earn a median annual salary of \$78,806.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Unfortunately, educational levels don't necessarily lead to higher wages. Women make up the majority of minimum-wage workers. Although lower wages are often tied to occupation segregation and family care issues, roughly 40% of the gender wage gap can't be explained away. The documented gender wage gap starts as soon as women and men begin their careers. Fewer women than men are hired for entry-level positions, despite women being 57% of recent college graduates. Corporate America promotes men at 30% higher rates than women during the early stages of their careers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

After considering many factors and data, we recommend the following:

01

Strengthen vocational and trade programs

specifically in cities and towns where a higher percentage of women do not have a high-school diploma. These programs provide valuable skills in less time than traditional schooling.

02

Increase provider reimbursement rates

for women-dominated career sectors and workforce training strategies (e.g., creating career pathways with stackable credentials).

03

Provide free and low-cost tuition options

to local community colleges and in-state colleges and universities to provide more opportunities for women to obtain advanced degrees without incurring debilitating student loan debt.

04

Enhance community colleges' funding

and bring a gender lens to community college institutions and programs to generate the culture, programs, and support needed for women to thrive.

05

Invest in high-quality educational pathways

including apprenticeships in the trades, paired with holistic supports such as caregiving, and enhanced flexibility to empower women and mothers to access the education and training they need.

06

Increase support for women in STEM

which will enable more young women to achieve high school graduation or GED certification and attain a minimum level of training that allows them to enter STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) careers. These careers are in high demand in RI and can provide higher pay and benefits than typical entry-level jobs.

07

Provide widespread internet access

to high-quality, low-cost internet and computers for students at all educational levels, especially in families where both parents and children need remote learning resources.