How are workers faring this Labor Day?

This weekend, we need to put Labor Day celebrations in perspective. Far too many workers in the Ocean State continue to struggle to keep their heads above water in an economy plagued by high unemployment and stagnant wages.

Consider these realities. The most recent data tells us...

The median hourly wage rose by just a penny since the start of the recession, from $16.93 to $16.94.

Median household income dropped to the lowest in New England at $49,033; this was also below the U.S. average of $50,054.

The number of workers forced to work part-time more than doubled since the start of recession due to unfavorable business conditions, seasonal employment and other economic reasons.

Rhode Island has the highest Latino unemployment rate in the country, at just over 19 percent.

More than 80,000 adults over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma.

Here is a key to unlocking a more prosperous economy...

A recent report from the national Economic Policy Institute finds a strong link between the educational attainment of a state's workforce and both productivity and median wages. Conversely, the paper finds no clear relationship between state tax rates and wages, suggesting that the best incentive we can give employers to grow jobs and wages in Rhode Island is an educated workforce, not a tax break.

This Labor Day we must commit to a number of actions that Rhode Island can take to increase the educational attainment of our current and future workers including:

Improve access to early childhood learning by continuing planned expansions of pre-kindergarten classrooms and maintaining expansions of affordable, quality child care;

Increase the number of Rhode Islanders who obtain high school equivalency diplomas by helping them to meet the new test requirements and fees;

Increase investments in adult education, including basic literacy, math, and English Language Services for non-native speakers; and

Continue to invest in quality K-12 education and to reinvest in higher education to slow down, or preferably freeze, tuition increases.