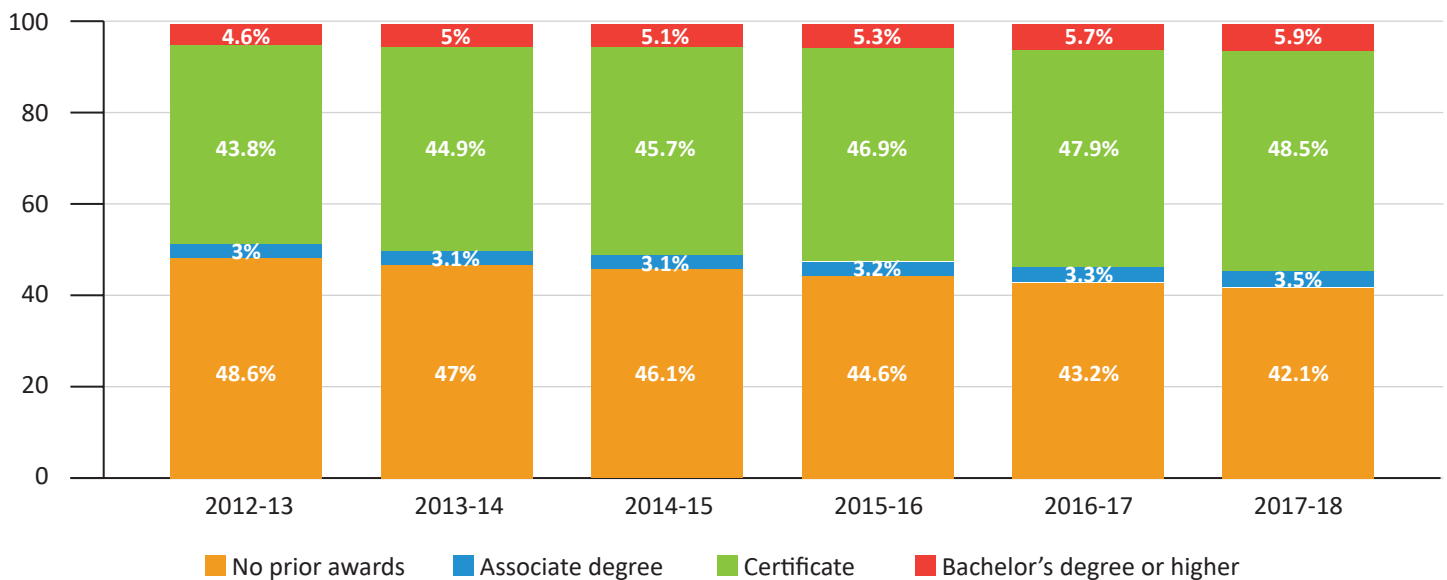


Going back to school

The number of first-time degree earners age 25 and older is dropping, but the number of older learners with a previous credential who earn another degree is on the rise.

Percent of bachelor's degree earners age 40 and older who had a previous credential



Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "Undergraduate Degree Earners Report, 2017-18," February 2019.



The number of first-time associate and bachelor's degree earners has dropped in almost all age groups since 2012-13, except for the under 25 group, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. The figures are consistent with trends when the economy is hot; that is, many older students tend to return to the workforce before completing a credential as jobs become more readily available. But a growing number of older students with previous credentials (such as associate and bachelor's degrees) are returning to attain another one, which signals that they are upgrading their skills. Among students age 40 and older who earned an associate degree in 2017-18, about 12 percent had a prior associate degree, compared to 9 percent in 2012-13. About 14 percent of them had a previous certificate, compared to about 10 percent in 2012-13. And 7.5 percent of them already had a baccalaureate, compared to 5.5 percent who did in 2012-13. There has been a significant increase among older adults with a baccalaureate who returned to college for an associate degree. Among recent baccalaureate earners age 40 and older, nearly half (49 percent) had an associate degree, compared to 44 percent who already had an associate degree when they earned their bachelor's degree in 2012-13.

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