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BUSINESS, CONSUMER, AND REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Career Academies Show Positive Results. Career academies represent one of the fastest-growing high school reforms in the nation, combining elements of the school restructuring and school-to-career movements. Organized as schools-within-schools, career academies use classroom- and work-based learning centered around an occupational area to help students gain the necessary skills to make successful transitions to post-secondary education, employment, or a combination of the two. A recent study of 10 career academies in disadvantaged areas around the country found that each was successful in establishing partnerships with a group of local employers and developing a range of career-awareness and work-based learning activities. The percentage of academy students participating in career-awareness activities outside of the school was more than twice as high as that of the control group. The gains in in-school career activities, employment during high school, and participation in high-quality work-based learning were more modest. The study found that increasing the quantity and quality of academy activities remains a challenge, as does fuller integration of classroom- and work-based learning.

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A New Explanation for the Education Wage Differential among Men. Common explanations for the widening wage differential between college- and high-school-educated workers include increased technology in the workplace, immigration, and decreased unionization. But a new study finds a different explanation, at least for men, in the forces of supply and demand. In particular, since the mid-1970s male college graduates have benefited from relative pay gains because younger generations of men have been attending college at smaller rates than their predecessors, thereby decreasing the supply of college-educated workers in each successive cohort. Thus, steadily increasing demand for college-educated workers would lead to an increased relative wage. According to the study, this relative earnings gain for younger college-educated male workers is the reason for the rise in the wage differential between college- and high school-educated workers from 25 percent in the mid-1970s to 40 percent in 1998. While the earnings differential has remained the same for older workers over the past 25 years, it has doubled for younger workers.

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Online Shopping Rate Shows First Decline. The latest findings from an ongoing survey of Internet users found that the percentage who made purchases online decreased for the first time last quarter. Between April 1998 and March 1999 the percentage of users who made online purchases grew from 47 to 74 percent, but it then dropped slightly to 71 percent last quarter. These findings are based on a sample drawn from a private firm's database of Internet users who have volunteered to participate in online research. Of course, continued growth in Internet usage should keep the volume of Internet purchases rising even if the percentage stops growing. The survey found that three-quarters of buyers are making multiple purchases, and 95 percent of online shoppers say that they plan to buy the same amount or even more online in the future. CDs, books, computer software and hardware, and airline tickets were the top items purchased.

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