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Posted Wednesday, May 22, 2002 - 7:41 pm [✉ e-mail this story to a friend](#)

Hodges to sign home school bill authored by Greenville students

By Paul Alongi

EDUCATION WRITER

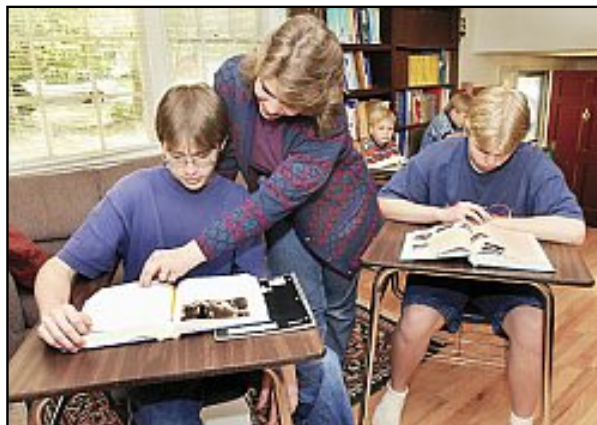
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A bill that gives home school students the same discount as public school students at state museums and parks one week a year was ratified by the Legislature on Wednesday, more than a year after two Greenville students proposed it as part of a government lesson.

Gov. Jim Hodges plans to sign the bill, designating the first full week of each October "South Carolina Home School Awareness Week," said Cortney Owings, a gubernatorial spokeswoman.

During that week, home school students will be able to enter state educational facilities at the same discount offered to public school students. The bill also allows foster parents to teach foster children at home for the first time.

The bill began as an assignment Jill Boone gave to her sons, Steven Bailey and Todd Boone whom she teaches at their Parkins Mill-area home. When they wrote the bill, Bailey was 12 and Boone was 14, she said.



OWEN RILEY JR./Staff

In the living room of their Greenville home which has been turned into a homeschool classroom, Jill Boone gives assistance to her son Todd Boone, 15, while son Steven Bailey, 13, works alone. In the background her sons Josh and Andrew Bailey, ages 6 and 8, work on their studies.

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"To be honest with you, I didn't think it was going to go this far," Jill Boone said. "I really anticipated some stumbling blocks along the way, but they weren't there."

The bill passed in a state in which home schooling has become increasingly popular.

In 1991, fewer than 1,000 students were taught at home. The number grew to 8,494 by last year, according to the state Department of Education.

And they showed some political muscle earlier this month.

A bill targeting diploma mills was tabled after home school supporters crowded into a Senate hearing to complain that it may have also threatened home schooling.

Kathy Carper, president of the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools, applauded Home School Awareness Week, but she said it would be only fair to go further by giving home school students all the same rights as public school students year round.

Although parents teach their children at home, they still have to pay school taxes, she said.

"I think there's a double standard there," Carper said. "These are students in the state of South Carolina."

After Bailey and Boone wrote the bill, they took it to House Speaker David Wilkins, R-Greenville, who agreed to sponsor it. He said he wanted to give home school parents and students the same opportunities to enter education facilities as other students.

"We need to recognize and understand that there are those who are very much involved in home schooling and that's part of our education system here in South Carolina," Wilkins said. "They play an important role, too."

Bailey and Todd Boone spoke to the House Education and Public Works Committee after submitting their bill last year, Jill Boone said. The bill was making progress until the Legislature bogged down in budget discussions last session, but it was revived this year, she said.

The Senate added the section on foster parents, but Wilkins said lawmakers made few other changes to the students' original proposal.

Phil Gaines, assistant director of state parks, said the parks already work with home school students, but he hopes the bill will make

them even more of a draw.

"We think it's a good thing," he said. "Hopefully, it encourages home schoolers to utilize the natural and cultural resources of the state."

Paul Alongi covers education with an emphasis on high schools and higher education. He can be reached at 298-4746.

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