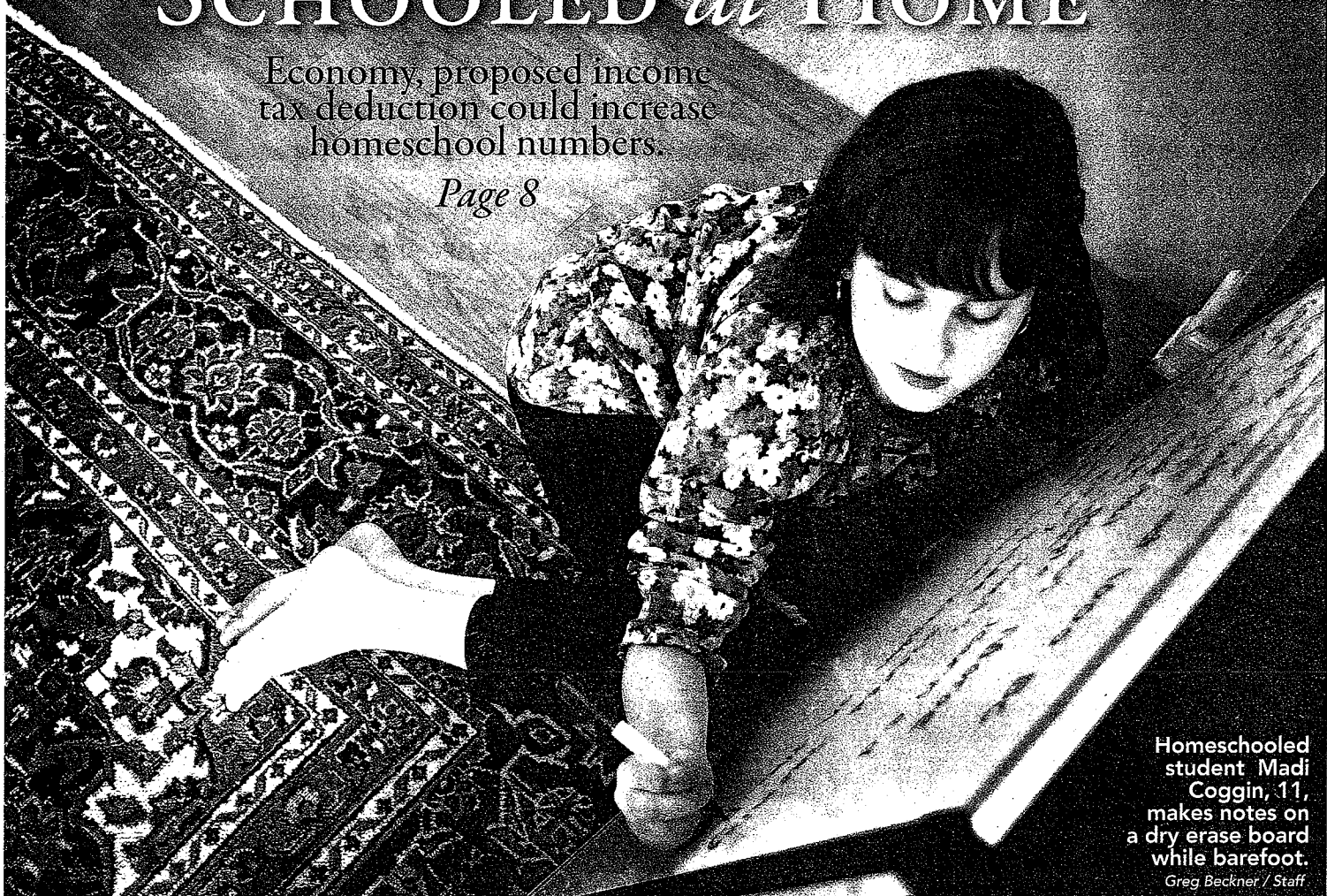


Greenville Journal

SCHOOLED *at* HOME

Economy, proposed income tax deduction could increase homeschool numbers.

Page 8



Homeschooled student Madi Coggin, 11, makes notes on a dry erase board while barefoot.

Greg Beckner / Staff

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Homeschooling gains traction across the Upstate

Although their exact numbers are hard to determine, estimates range from 17,000 to more than 20,000

BY CINDY LANDRUM | STAFF

Making the decision to homeschool four years ago seemed like a natural progression for Cindy Edmonds, since she had been doing so informally from the time her daughter was in kindergarten.

Edmonds, who has a master's degree in education and lives in Boiling Springs, subbed for the third grade in the Spartanburg County public school her daughter attended, only to see she was teaching those students the same material her kindergarten already knew.

"After she came home from K-4, we'd do school after hours," Edmonds said. "She was already bored with school in kindergarten."

Private school didn't meet the family's needs, either. So the Edmonds decided to teach their children at home.

It's a decision more families are making in the Upstate, across South Carolina and the nation as well. And unlike many of those who pioneered the homeschool movement, for a growing number of parents the decision is not restricted to religious or moral reasons.

"People of all different faiths do this. Atheists do this," said Suzanne Brown, a homeschool mom who started the Upstate Homeschool Co-op, a place where homeschool students may take courses taught by other homeschool parents with expertise in those fields. "For many, it plays a big part, but it's not the sole reason. Education is not one size fits all." Mike and Tanya Coggin of Greer said they weren't unhappy with public schools when they decided to homeschool their children three years ago.

Their children attended Pelham Road Elementary, thought of as one of Greenville County's

best elementary schools.

"We wanted to take a more active role in the education of our children," Mike Coggin said. "We have identified real strengths and weaknesses in each of our kids that I'm not sure we would have identified if we hadn't been homeschooling."

Brown said the number of homeschool students is growing, but an exact number of children being homeschooled is difficult to determine because the state Department of Education does not keep track.

In South Carolina, parents who homeschool must register their children with their local school district, the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools or another of the more than 30 homeschool associations with at least 50 members. Estimates range from 17,000 students to more than 20,000.

In Greenville County, about 3,000 students are homeschooled. Nationwide, the number is estimated at up to 2.35 million.

The numbers in South Carolina could increase if a bill granting a \$2,000 income tax deduction under consideration by the Legislature passes.

In addition, there are more re-



Eric Coggin, 13, does his school work while the home school mascot Cici the cat takes a nap on his desk and dining room table.



Photos by Greg Beckner / Staff
Nathan Coggin, 7, left, and his sister Madi, 11, listen to their mother and teacher Tanya Coggin during a lesson on Africa in their homeschool classroom.

sources available to parents.

Two big homeschool conferences will be held this month in the Upstate.

The Teach Them Diligently Convention will open this weekend at the Spartanburg Expo and Event Center. The Southeast Homeschool Conference and Convention will be held in Greenville March 22 to March 24 at the TD Convention Center.

A multitude of curriculums are available for purchase. And there are more opportunities to outsource subjects to other parents, tutors or online providers.

The Upstate Homeschool Co-op started with 19 students meeting in Brown's house in 1997. This year, the group has 440 students and offers more than 90 classes for students in K-4 through 12th grade, Brown said.

The co-op's elementary school program has doubled and there is a waiting list for classes from kindergarten through 6th grade.

"There's a huge need," she said.

"But we just don't have the space."

The co-op also offers compet-

itive sports teams, field trips, clubs, and produces a yearbook and a newspaper. The approach allows students to work at different levels in different subjects, she said.

"Parents may not feel qualified to teach their child science or math or Spanish. But for the co-op, I hire people who specialize in those subjects. Some have teaching degrees, but some don't."

A mechanical engineer teaches physics, while a small business owner may teach economics, she said. "These are the kind of teachers I want to teach my children. They are passionate about the classes they teach."

Tanya Coggin said the co-op also gives children outside accountability, although homeschool parents are required to keep attendance and grade records.

"It's different when you fail more than when you fail somebody from outside," she said. "I think it's important for a kid to take a test."

She said many of the questions she had about homeschooling were "fear-based." For now, homeschooling is the best choice for them, she said. "There are some parents who shouldn't do this."

Regina Crane's children have attended public school, private school and charter school. She is now homeschooling two of her three children who have not yet reached college age. The other is a senior at Broome High School.

"For me, it's trying to do what's best for each of my children at that time," she said. "I take it year by year. We re-evaluate it and pray about every year. Right now, for us it's what works."

"People of all different faiths do this. Atheists do this. For many, [religion or morality] plays a big part, but it's not the sole reason. Education is not one size fits all."

Suzanne Brown, a homeschool mom who started the Upstate Homeschool Co-op, a place where homeschool students may take courses taught by other homeschool parents with expertise in those fields.

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