

Dear Friends:

Thank you for visiting my "Focus on Reading" Web site to learn more about how I am working to support and improve literacy efforts in our state.

My wife, Rachel, and I are committed to reading. One of our greatest joys as parents is reading to our sons and listening to them read on their own. At bedtime, Luke and Sam choose a book for us to read. We read the book to them, and then they take turns reading the book to us. Now we're working to share our family's love of reading with students all across South Carolina.

We want to make sure every child in South Carolina can read on or above grade level by the end of third grade. To help meet this goal, in 1999, we established the Governor's Institute of Reading at the State Department of Education. In December of that year, we held a statewide Reading Summit to examine the best practices in the teaching of reading. As a result of the Summit, we worked with the State Department to form the South Carolina Reading Initiative, a professional development effort for administrators and teachers in South Carolina elementary schools. With funding from the General Assembly, we implemented the Initiative in 50 school districts and 210 elementary schools with grants for literacy coaches. During the past three years, more than 100 literacy coaches have worked with the instructional staff, parents, and children in these elementary schools to improve reading instruction and achievement.

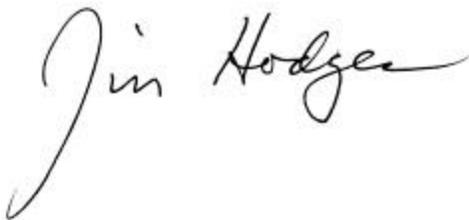
Through our partnership with the Governor's Institute of Reading, my Focus on Reading initiative is designed to introduce students to quality literature, promote parental and community involvement in education, and spark a love of reading throughout our state. The initiative is comprised of several programs, each tailored to reach a specific age group but linked in their common goal of connecting all students with good books. The programs include:

- Reading Honor Roll (All Grades)
- Palmetto Greatest Generation Project (High School)
- Cool Books (pre-kindergarten through 8th grade)
- Middle School Reading Challenge (Middle School Grades)
- Story Time with Governor Hodges (Elementary Grades)
- Reading with Rachel (Elementary Grades)

Promoting reading requires a personal commitment from each of us. Reading allows parents to spend more quality time with their children. Good reading skills improve student performance in all subject areas. Reading sparks the imagination and opens the door to a world of opportunities and rewards.

Thank you for your support of our efforts to improve education in South Carolina. Together, we can celebrate the joy and power of reading.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim Hodges". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the printed name below it.

Jim Hodges