



## AROUND TOWN: Tippins resigns as Senate Education Committee chairman

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**THE POPULAR CHAIRMAN** of the Senate Education Committee, **Lindsey Tippins**, R-west Cobb, has submitted his resignation as chairman.

**Dr. Jimmy Stokes**, executive director of the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders, hopes Tippins will change his mind.

“The most tragic news of the 2018 General Assembly is that yesterday Lindsey Tippins, perhaps the greatest and most effective advocate for public education in the General Assembly, submitted his resignation as Senate Education Chairman,” Stokes told the MDJ. “Lindsey Tippins has more common sense and more wisdom than any legislator under the Gold Dome. He has been the vanguard and defender of public education every day he has been in the General Assembly. There is no one that can take his place. Let us hope that he reconsiders.”

What triggered that decision involves a bill that seeks more money for charter schools, one Tippins believes is not fair or equitable to traditional public schools. The bill would give charter schools the average of what all school districts receive in state and local funding and in equalization, costing an additional \$17.9 million a year.

“My problem with that is charter schools had a funding formula, but you have to realize that charter schools don’t have to take every kid that comes in the front door,” said Tippins, a former chairman of the Cobb Board of Education. “They don’t have to provide all the services that are provided, and they can also dismiss kids because of disciplinary reasons and send them back to public school, so while they may not be earning the average that public schools earn, they don’t have the average problems that public schools have either, because they have a select clientele.”

House Bill 787 passed the House and landed in the Senate Education Committee. Tippins said he spoke with Lt. Gov. **Casey Cagle**, letting him know he could not in good conscience pass the bill out of his committee. According to Tippins, while charter schools were asking for more money, there are 577,000 traditional public school students in 46 school districts already receiving less funding than the average charter schools receive.

And if the bill giving them more money passes, the number of traditional students who would receive less in state and local funding for maintenance and operations would rise to 1,150,000 in 90 school districts.

Were the state to bring all students in Georgia’s public schools up to the level of funding the charter schools receive now, it would cost an additional \$170 million. If the charter school funding was increased with the bill’s passage, Tippins said, it would cost the state an additional \$510 million to close the gap between what charter schools then received and what public schools were getting.

Tippins wanted to know how he would tell a school system such as **Jeff Davis** County, the lowest funded district in the state, which receives \$6,952 per student, he was voting to raise the funding charter schools received from \$8,415 to \$8,816.

“It’s hard for me to explain to Jeff Davis County why they’re getting about \$1,450 a year less than what charter schools are getting when Jeff Davis takes any kid who walks in the door regardless of disabilities,” Tippins said.

Tippins said he told Cagle he would not allow the bill out of committee. At the same time, he also told him he was more than happy to resign as chairman and let Cagle appoint someone else if it was that important to pass the bill. Tippins said Cagle told him to stay on as chairman, and so Tippins drafted a compromise bill. The compromise would allow any charter school to receive the additional funding if it met the state average on the College and Career Ready Performance Index — 73.7. (Virtual charter schools were excluded as none of them met the average.) The compromise passed out of the Senate Education Committee unanimously March 23. But when it came to the floor for a vote last Tuesday, Sen. **Matt Brass**, R-Newnan, amended it, changing it back to the House version.

The Senate then passed the House version. Of the 37 Republicans in the Senate, 35 voted for the House version, with one excused. Tippins was the sole Republican to vote no.

“The bottom-line for whatever reason if I got 35 of my 37 caucus members, if that bill is reflective of their vision for education in the state of Georgia, they got the wrong person being the committee chairman,” Tippins said. “Because I cannot further that vision. I want to be fair to charter schools, but I want to be fair to traditional public schools, which have to take every kid that walks in the door and have to provide an education for students regardless of what the challenges are.”

Tippins said he holds no ill will against any of his colleagues. It’s simply a matter of staying true to his principles, while realizing that if the majority of the Republican caucus doesn’t see eye to eye with him on education policy, there’s no use chairing the education committee. When new committee appointments are made next year, he intends to decline the education chairmanship if nominated.

**Margaret Ciccarelli**, legislative affairs director for the Professional Association of Georgia Educators, the state’s largest education association, called Tippins’ work as chair of the education committee both thoughtful and measured.

“He considers the impact of proposed policy on all Georgia students in addition to those in his district and has brought stability and consistency to a chair position that had high turnover before his tenure. His respectful evidence-driven leadership is sorely needed in Georgia schools and in politics,” Ciccarelli said.

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