



ICOMBO SCHOOL PLACEMENT OF MULTIPLES STUDY

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SUMMARY:

School placement of multiples was studied by the International Council of Multiple Births Organization (ICOMBO) in 2019, in answer to multiple requests from ICOMBO members for assistance on this topic. Whether to put multiples together or to separate them in school is a thorny issue – one which many families don't have enough information about or have enough support when dealing with their multiples' school. This study was done to help parents and school personnel to be better informed when making decisions about school placement of multiples.

Placement of multiples in school is a common issue universally. This has escalated in the past thirty years with the rapid increase in the births of multiple birth children – due to improved maternal health, fertility treatments and due to women delaying childbearing into their thirties (which increases the risk of a multiple birth). Multiples in school classrooms are now the norm instead of a rarity. Many schools have policies, some written and some unwritten, about always separating siblings in different classrooms. Many reasons are given, such as “too hard for the teacher to tell the twins apart,” but often these reasons aren't backed up by studies or research.

A 24-question survey was distributed via Multiple of America's Survey Monkey account and publicized on Facebook and by multiple birth associations (MOA's) around the world. The survey was written and released in three languages – English, French and Spanish. The survey was opened in October 2018 and closed in June 2019.

A total of 2,842 parents of multiples whose children were three years of age or older and whose children had attended school for at least one year completed this survey. The respondents were from over 18 countries, with the United States, Australia, France, Spain, Finland, Canada, and New Zealand being the largest enrollers.

The majority of the respondents completed the English version (70%), while 21% completed it in French and 9% in Spanish. Two-thirds (66%) of the parents were members of a Multiple Birth Organization. The majority of the multiples represented in this survey (79%) were 11 years of age or younger.

The great majority of the multiples (72%) attended public school at some time in their school years, while 17% attended a private school, 10% attended a parochial or faith-based school and 1% attended another type of school.

The key findings for this international study were:

Lack of policies on school placement: A majority of the parents said that their school didn't have a fixed or set policy on placement of multiples, yet it was often difficult to achieve the school placement they wanted.

Parents' wishes are not always accommodated: Almost one-fourth of the families who requested school placement for their multiples were denied their desired school placement at least one of the years that their multiples attended school.

A common desire to place multiples together: Just over half of parents asked for their multiples to be placed together in the classroom at some point in their school years. The three most common reasons were: Multiples wouldn't be happy apart; easier to communicate with one teacher and easier to keep track of school assignments.

Some parents recognized a need to separate their multiples at school: Just over 40% of parents asked for their multiples to be separated in the classroom at some point in their school years. The three most common reasons were: To help their individuality; one multiple was too dominant; and multiples are too competitive.

The desire of parents to have their multiples together or apart changes with age: From our study results, it is clear that at younger ages, especially three to six years old, the parents were more likely to request that the multiples be placed together in the classroom. However, when the multiples were seven years and older, the parents were more likely to ask that they be separated at school and this percentage became larger as the children advanced in school.

Gaps in knowledge and resources: The four most common resources/references used by parents to try to get the desired school placement were: Information from other parents; information from the Internet; information from a MBO booklet and discussions on a MBO Facebook group. However, over half of the parents weren't aware that there were publications, research and books to assist them. Only a third of the MBO members said that they got information from their MBO that helped them regarding school placement. Many districts/states/provinces have laws that protect the parents' right to choose school placement for their multiples, but many are unaware these laws exist.

In conclusion, the clear message for educators and school policy makers is that they should be making placement decisions for multiple birth children based on the individual needs of each child. No two sets of multiples are exactly the same so fixed school policies don't take each child into consideration. Schools should respect the close bond that the multiples have while also encouraging individual abilities and strengths.

Please refer to the complete survey results which also includes many comments from parents of multiple birth children all over the world.
