



ICOMBO
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF
Multiple Birth Organisations



SCHOOL PLACEMENT RESULTS ARE IN



News From Around The World

July 2020

Chairperson Report

I am excited to release the results of our latest study, **School Placement of Multiples**. This research study was conducted via an online survey of almost 3,000 parents in 18 countries, during 2018–2019.

The results should provide valuable resource for parents and educators when deciding whether to separate multiples into different classrooms in the school.

This study reinforces the findings of other studies, completed by Professor David Hay, Professor Patricia Preedy and others, that there should be no set rule for classroom placement of multiples. Each placement decision should be based on the needs of each child. This study will be a great tool when you are advocating for multiple birth families – whether it be with education departments or individual schools. I encourage you to make the study findings accessible for your members so that they too can use it if they need evidence on best practice for school placement.

In addition, we have placed a number of related articles on the ICOMBO website that are freely accessible by the public and can be used in advocacy activities. The information can be found at:

<http://icombo.org/classroom-placement/>

A project such as this requires a huge effort from a

Sharing Survey Results.....

We would appreciate your assistance in promotion of this important study on classroom placement of multiples. ICOMBO will be creating some Facebook posts that you can share with your organisations. You may also wish to create your own posts to include the educational needs in your particular region. To assist with this, we have some images that you can use. Our thanks to **Twins Trust** for providing the images and obtaining permission for their use.

The images can be accessed from our G-suite:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_opTqFYmij_szY9tRylzflIh1ZH6WRf?usp=sharing

number of our volunteers, in particular Dr Susan Griffith, ICOMBO Research Director. She managed the project from creating the survey, organising translation into French and Spanish, compiling and analysing the results and writing the final report. Marion Gevers translated the survey into French and Lucila Menendez completed the Spanish translation. I wish to thank these ladies for the time and effort they gave to this project



Monica Rankin

Job well done!

In addition, without the support of all our member organisations; that is you the members, we would not have been able to reach so many parents of multiples and achieved meaningful results.

A summary of the study is included in this newsletter. The full report is available by clicking [here](#).

In addition, there are posts on our Facebook page that you can share:

<https://www.facebook.com/InternationalCouncilofMultipleBirthOrganisations>

Please circulate the information to your committees, clubs, branches and member families.

Regards,

Monica



We are happy to release the complete results of our ICOMBO School Placement of Multiples international study. We've also attached a shorter version, a two page summary, and a list of possible resources to help parents get more information about their multiple birth children's placement in school.

Thank you so much to everyone who participated in this survey!

J. Susan Griffith MD

Research Director, ICOMBO

National worker, Multiples of America (MOA)

Summary Results:

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. This is 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.



“ 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.”

Survey Key Findings

Dr. Susan Griffith, M.D.

Key Findings:

The key findings for this international study were:

Lack of policies on school placement:

A majority of the parents said that their school did not 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
- ◆ It is easier to communicate with one teacher
- ◆ It is 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
- ◆ 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 Multiple Birth Organization (MBO) booklet
- ◆ 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.



"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."

School Placement Resources

Check with your local/national Multiple Birth Organization (MBO) for help. Many, such as AMA-PAMU in Spain, have been instrumental in getting legislation passed to allow the parents the right to choose. Many MBO's have helpful pamphlets and other information to assist you when talking to school personnel about your school placement choice for your multiples.

- ◆ **Multiples of America in the United States** has done several surveys on this subject, "Education of Multiple Birth Children," and has released the information in pamphlets. The first study was done in 1988-89 and the second was done in 1998-99. MOA is also now in the process of updating their pamphlet, *Placement of Multiple Birth Children in School – A Guide for Parents and Educators*, which includes information from many research studies about school placement of multiples. Many parents have found the pamphlets helpful when talking to school personnel about placement issues.
- ◆ **Twins Trust in the U.K.** has information about the legal position in the U.K. and a checklist to help parents and teachers decide on classroom placement. Visit the website [here](#).
- ◆ **In Finland, Finnish Multiple Births** has a printed guidebook, which they are hoping to have updated to an e-guide by December 2020. They now have a paid worker for two months who is writing a review on "Multiples at school" which will be in the Finnish language.
- ◆ **Christine Disselkamp, in Germany**, has done a study on triplets in school. It is still the major psychological study of triplets worldwide. The English translation is "Triplets: a very special siblings relationship." At this time it is only available in German:
 - ◇ Disselkamp, C., 2006. *Drillinge: eine besondere Geschwisterbeziehung*, Marburg: Tectum-Verl.

Many other researchers have studied this subject, and many parents of multiples have found the information in these studies to be useful to them in

their quest for placement of their multiples in school. **Here are just a few of the studies:**

1. Pat Preedy in the U.K. and David Hay, in Australia have done research on this subject, both individually and jointly. Many of their studies should be available online.
2. Pat Preedy, in the U.K., and John Mascazine, in the U.S., have collaborated on many studies about multiples in the classroom. They are working on a new website to be unveiled in the next year or so.
3. Alexander, M.T. [Educating Multiples in the Classroom: Together or Separate?](#) *Early Childhood Educ J* **40**, 133–136 (2012)
4. Staton, S., Thorpe, K., Thompson, C., & Danby, S. (2012). [To separate or not to separate? Parental decision-making regarding the separation of twins in the early years of schooling.](#) *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 10(2), 196–208.
5. [What Effect Does Classroom Separation Have on Twins, Behavior, Progress at School, and Reading Abilities?](#) by Coks Feenstra, child psychologist from the Netherlands. This is a Dutch website but you can translate into English quite easily.
6. Van Leewen, M., Van den Berg, S., Van Beijsterveldt, T., & Boomsma, D. (2005) [Effects of Twin Separation in Primary School.](#) *Twin Research and Human Genetics*, 8(4), 384-391.
7. Twins Trust (formerly TAMBA), the MBO in the United Kingdom, has also studied the issue of placement of multiples in school. An Analysis by Dr. Erika Fraser – MULTIPLE CHOICE, [The Educational Needs and Experiences of Multiple Birth Children](#) was released in 2009.

Be sure to check your city, state/province and national laws, because there is much legislation around the world that requires the schools to honor the parents' choice of schooling their multiple birth children together or separately. However, be persistent, because some parents were not allowed to choose placement even though the legislation was in place.

A few examples of areas with this type of legislation are Madrid, Spain and the states of Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia in the United States. There are many others – be sure to check in your area.

For the most current information on School Placement and resources

Visit our website at:

<http://icombo.org/classroom-placement/>

Acknowledgements:

Adapted from a resource prepared by Sheri Gatehouse (a mother of twins) during her teacher training.

Although some aspects of schooling are no different than for singletons or siblings there are other areas where special consideration needs to be taken into account. Because they are at the same stage at the same time there is a natural tendency to compare more so than with siblings. Twins/triplets can be born physically different developmentally due to competition in the womb. In addition there is the increased risk of prematurity and this can lead to developmental delays with gross and fine motor skills and speech and language skills. Each child may be affected in different ways. Even when not born prematurely multiples are more likely to experience language problems or delayed speech often resulting in reading problems. These are sometimes caused by group talk or twins speak reinforcing each other's mistakes as well as developmental delays.

Twins develop a special relationship between themselves that affects how they relate to each other and those around them. Hay & Preedy have identified different types of twin relationships:

Closely Coupled:

- ◆ A unit – can't function without twin
- ◆ No or few other friends
- ◆ Dress & behave identically
- ◆ Responds to either name
- ◆ Slows down/speeds up to stay level with twin
- ◆ Twin language

Extreme Individual:

- ◆ Dislikes being a multiple
- ◆ Opts out if twin is successful
- ◆ Polarises (opposite extremes)
- ◆ Excessively competitive

- ◆ Not pleased if twin is successful
- ◆ Tries to dominate
- ◆ Really dislikes dressing alike or doing the same thing

Mature Dependence:

- ◆ An individual with own identity
- ◆ Shared and separate friends
- ◆ Supportive of twin (healthy competition)
- ◆ Able to choose options the same or different from twin.

There will be various degrees of these. Naturally the type of relationship your multiples have will impact on how they handle school and if they should be kept together or separation is an option.

There has not been a lot of research done on the effects of separation on twins in education and what there is has given mixed results. The best thing is to consider the pros and cons in relation to your own multiples. Of course sometimes separation is not an option but the points below may provide some discussion points that should be raised with their teacher. It can also be difficult as separation may be ideal for one multiple but not the other (s). These pointers may also help you think about how you respond to their performance at school if they are kept together.



Things to Consider Before Separating

Ability:

- ⇒ Is one markedly more able than the other?
- ⇒ Does the less able twin opt out of activities?
- ⇒ Does the able twin do work for the other?

Behaviour:

- ⇒ Competitive, try and outdo each other
- ⇒ Disruptive – fight, disturb others
- ⇒ Compete for teacher attention
- ⇒ Tattling to teacher or parents

Their Bond:

- ⇒ Fear of separation
- ⇒ Co-dependent
- ⇒ One dominates or restricts the other

Socialisation:

- ⇒ Do they make friends easily?
- ⇒ Have they spent time alone?

Speech & Language:

- ⇒ Does one speak for the other?

Family Life:

- ⇒ Experienced recent loss/death
- ⇒ Divorce
- ⇒ Moved house or city

How Others View Twins:

- ⇒ Constantly comparing them to each other
- ⇒ Relate to them as one person
- ⇒ Label them

“Twins develop a special relationship between themselves that affects how they relate to each other and those around them.”

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Advantages of Separation

- The children are able to operate as individuals within the class situation.
- Separation allows twins to work at their own pace without pressure from the other, or holding back to allow the other to catch up.
- The teacher is more likely to compare the multiple child against the peer group instead of his or her co-multiple(s).
- The multiple birth child is able to operate without his or her co-multiple telling, particularly if he or she is in trouble.
- The multiple birth child has an opportunity to make friends and socialise as an individual.

Disadvantages of Separation

- Multiple birth children may need the support of each other particularly if they have not experienced separation prior to school.
- Even if multiple birth children are comfortable when separated they may need to be able to check up on what the other is doing.
- If one child is dominant the dominant child may lose confidence as he or she no longer has the co-multiple to organise.
- The children may be compared more at home particularly if one appears to be making more progress (e.g. gets a reading book first).
- The teachers are less likely to understand how the children operate as multiples (e.g. being upset if one is ill or in trouble).

How Does Separation Affect Parents?

- Have to split time evenly to both classes.
- Increases comparison of the teachers.
- Sometimes have to learn two different ways of doing the same thing.
- Have to deal with emotional blowouts at home if twins prefer to be together.

Resources to Help Make the Decision

This is a great resource and includes a section 'together or apart' with a checklist which is free to download. The checklist is for parents and teachers to complete to help provide a more informed view for decision making.

The following book is helpful: *Parenting School-Age Twins and Multiples*, by Christina Baglivi Tinglof. This book brings together scientific literature and interviews with 44 families as well as the author's own personal experience as a twin mum.

Conclusions

- Keeping twins together until sufficient evidence warrants separation is usually the best way to go.
- Remember the needs of the multiples.
- Separation is not irreversible.
- Ongoing communications and consultation between the teacher(s) and you the parents is the key to a positive result.



Visit our [resource page](#) for additional information including a checklist : [Together or Separate Checklist](#)

Additional Reading:

- Coventry W, Byrne B, Coleman M, Olson R, Corley R, Wilcut E, Samuelsson S 2009. Does classroom separation affect twins' reading ability in the early years of school? *Twin Research and Human Genetics* 12: 455-461.
- Hay DA, Preedy P 2006. Meeting the educational needs of multiple birth children. *Early Human Development* 82: 397-403.
- Jones L, De Gioia K 2010. The same or separate? An exploration of teachers' perceptions of the classroom assignment of twins in prior to school and kindergarten to year two school settings. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 8: 239-253.
- Lacina J 2010. School placement and separation of twins: A review of research. *Childhood Education* 86: 172-174.
- Polderman T, Bartels M, Verhulst F, Huizink A, van Beijsterveldt C, Boomsma DI 2010. No effect of classroom sharing on educational achievement in twins: A prospective, longitudinal cohort study. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 64: 36-40.
- Preedy P 1999. Meeting the educational needs of pre-school and primary aged twins and higher multiples. In Sandbank, A. C. (Ed.), *Twin and triplet psychology* (pp. 70-99). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Segal NL, Russell JM 1992. Twins in the classroom: School policy issues and recommendations. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* 3: 69-84.
- Staton S, Thorpe K, Thompson C, Danby S 2012. To separate or not to separate? Parental decision-making regarding the separation of twins in the early years of schooling. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 10: 196-208.
- van Leeuwen M, van den Berg SM, van Beijsterveldt TCEM, Boomsma DI 2005. Effects of twin separation in primary school. *Twin Research and Human Genetics* 8: 384-391.
- Webbink D, Hay D, Visscher P 2007. Does sharing the same class in school improve cognitive abilities of twins? *Twin Research and Human Genetics* 10: 573-580.

2020 has proven to be challenging for parents around the globe dealing with the COVID-19 crisis that has greatly impacted each of our daily lives. One of the biggest impacts has been adapting to school closures and the new learning environments that have been created for students. And, those environments are often driven by local governments that each have their own variation of how learning will occur. Variations continue to evolve as the impacts of the virus ebb and flow through our communities:

- Online learning
- Assignments sent home to be completed and returned
- Home Schooling
- Return to the classroom
- Online learning coupled with limited classroom

How our children adapt to their new learning environment is impacted by many economical and social factors. For instance, not all students have access to the internet and hardware needed to learn online for a variety of reasons including limited funds of the local school municipality, location of internet services, or limited resources at home.

Some children have a harder time adapting to online learning as they are very social and miss the interaction with other students.

And in many cases, the at-home and online learning need to be supervised by a parent who is ready, willing and able to provide the structure and discipline required for the learning experience to be successful.

Sound familiar? These factors and many more have made the 2020 learning experiences and options stressful for parents and students. And, as we layer in the return to classrooms, whether fulltime or partial, we add in the anxiety of keeping our children and families safe from a virus that is not yet fully understood.

If you are heading into a new school year, you may be making decisions on how to proceed; or, you may have clear instructions from your government on how they will proceed with schooling. As parents of multiples, you may have previously taken a stance on school placement and whether or not your multiples would be separated in school. You made those choices, or, you are getting ready to make them using clearly defined resources, including the school placement survey and materials provided in this newsletter. The need to consider each multiple and what is best for each as individuals is still

important; however, during this pandemic event you may want to also consider some short-term impacts that may be best for your entire family. As a mother who always preferred separation for my multiples; my choice this year would be very different to ensure anxiety and safety considerations for the entire family.

Here are some considerations for keeping multiples together in the upcoming school year even if that is a short-term decision as we ride out the impacts of COVID-19.

- ♦ ***How much time do you as a parent have to balance multiple online schedules/plans?*** It's a balancing act; school, home, work outside the home, family time.....it all adds up to more than a fulltime schedule. If one online learning plan and schedule simplifies your schedule it may warrant placing multiples together this year. And, another plus is they have another "classmate" at the table if virtual learning includes online class participation.
- ♦ ***Is your school combining online learning and classroom learning by splitting classroom schedules to accommodate smaller class sizes?*** If your multiples are assigned different classroom schedules because they are not together, this could add stress to everyone involved. Try and keep things as simple as possible for the entire family.
- ♦ ***Do you have concerns about creating multiple "bubbles" by having your multiples in two separate classrooms?*** Science tells us that limiting our impact to "safe bubbles" can limit our exposure to the virus. The more individuals your family is exposed to, the higher the chance of being exposed to the virus. Keeping your multiples together can limit that exposure.
- ♦ ***Is overall anxiety in your household spinning out of control?*** A pandemic adds stress and anxiety to an already hectic world. Many parents are concerned about work, family safety, additional tasks to ensure a safe environment, and, missing loved ones who they can not readily visit. That anxiety is felt by all members of your household whether intended or not. Our children are not immune to those same feelings. If not separating your multiples is one less anxiety that they need to deal with this year, then that may be the best overall decision for your family for the immediate future.

Stay safe and enjoy your multiples.