



NEW YORK ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS Position Statement on School Placement for Multiples

Position

The New York Association of School Psychologists believes very strongly that the decision on school placement for multiples must be made on an individual basis. We support a **flexible and informed policy** on the placement of multiple-birth children. There should not be a blanket policy in place for the automatic separation or placement together of multiples. School boards and principals must allow for flexibility. As with any classification of people, there is rarely one solution that works best for all.

Research

Despite a relatively small number of studies, educational researchers in the field of twin research strongly advocate a flexible policy on school placement that permits parental involvement in the decision. Each set of twins / multiple-birth siblings is unique in how they will interact and adjust to the school settings. Therefore, making placement decisions upon review of the issues and needs of the children involved is best practice.

Some researchers outline the need for a flexible policy on school placement, as well as involving parents in such decisions. Hay and Preedy have developed a helpful website located at www.twinsandmultiples.org that assists parents, teachers, and administrators in making placement decisions. They also advocate reconsidering the decision in cases where each child's educational needs are not being adequately addressed.

Trends in Education

There is a strong tendency to separate multiples in school based solely on the fact of a multiple birth. The assumption is that separation is healthy for multiple birth children to help insure a positive self-concept. The school wants the children to develop as individuals rather than as one of a group (the twins, the triplets, etc.). In trying to help them develop as individuals, the school may diminish the very individuality it hopes to instill in them by treating all multiples alike.

There is often confusion made between the physical separation of twins and their development of individual identity and independence. This confusion promotes the placement of twins in separate classrooms as the "best" way to encourage the individual process for all twins. In reality, each set of multiples have their own unique dynamics and developmental time tables. Placement in separate classrooms does not fit the needs of all multiples any more than does placement together. What is true for all multiples is that their classroom placement has an important effect on their relationship and their lives. In order for these effects to be positive, their placement needs to be evaluated every year so that it can be adjusted as necessary to meet the changing needs of the children.

Twins just starting school usually benefit from the social support they give each other when they are in the same room. They seem to find it easy to engage in different activities when they have the option of being together. When they are forced to separate into different classrooms, they may get the message that there is something wrong about being a twin or multiple. They may suffer emotional stress from worry about their absent co-twin(s), find it difficult to do their school work, or demonstrate greater internalizing problem behaviors.

Special Considerations

There are, however, individual circumstances which would indicate separation as desirable. Some of these are: Constant togetherness is hindering the development of one or more of the multiples. Insensitive comparisons have led to feelings of inadequacy in one or more of the multiples (note that these comparisons can be made either by peers or by adults). The multiples cause disruptive behavior as a group. One or more of the multiples appears to resent the lack of privacy resulting from sharing a classroom. One or more of the multiples proves to be a constant distraction to the other. The multiples want to be separated.

Multiples should also, at times be separated to insure that they can function as individuals. This separation, however, does not necessarily mean separate classes all the time. Separation can also be handled by having the multiples work in different groups or on different topics. While the teacher should look for signs of dependence, they must also realize that at times the multiples similar likes and dislikes may be caused by their common home environment. Before assuming it is a sign of dependence the teacher should ask her/himself if he would be concerned if he saw similar behavior from siblings separated by a year.

Most of these considerations apply to other groups of children as well. You may have close friendships which hinder the development of one or more of the children. Some children are disruptive when grouped together. For individual children, these issues will be at best partially addressed due to a number of factors--the number of classes; the number of students in a group with discipline problems; the academic level of the students, etc. With multiples, often times the fact that they are multiples will be the primary focus regardless of their educational needs. They may be well developed individuals not needing any special consideration yet forced into separate classes even when there are strong educational indications to do otherwise.

Role of the School Psychologist

School Psychologists are uniquely trained to integrate the knowledge and skill base of psychology with their specific training in education, child development, and educational systems. School Psychologists should be viewed as one resource for an informed voice in the placement decision of multiples. When part of a multidisciplinary team (including administrators, teachers and parents), a child centered decision can be made.

This checklist and questionnaire provides a framework for school professionals when discussing placement of multiple birth children in school.

http://www.twinsandmultiples.org/downloads/school_checklist.doc

Summary

NYASP recommends that schools adopt a flexible and informed approach to decisions about separating twins/multiples at school, which at the very least, takes into account the characteristics and experiences of each twin/multiple as well as the views of the parents. The best way to foster individuality is to treat the children as individuals from the start. If there are specific concerns backed by supportive facts, the multiples should be separated. And any decision to separate the

twins/multiples within the first few years of school should be taken with care and involve considerable planning and follow-up.

Works Reviewed

Beauchamp & Brooks (2003). The Perceptions, Policy, and Practice of Educating Twins: A Review. *Psychology in the Schools*, v40 n4 p429-38.

DiLalla & Mullineaux (2008). The Effect of Classroom Environment on Problem Behaviors: A Twin Study. *Journal of School Psychology*, v46 n2 p107-128.

Dreyer (2000). *Placement of Multiple Birth Children in School: A Guide for Educators*. National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, Inc.

Hay and Preedy (2001). Two, four, six, eight: Educating Twins, triplets, and more. *Twin Research*, v5, p582-583.

McNamara & McNamara (1986). Same or Separate Classes? *Twins*, March/April 1986, v 2, n5, p18-19.

Theroux & Tingley (1983). *Twins in School*. Research Reports from The Center for Study of Multiple Birth.

Tully, Moffitt, Caspi, Taylor, Kiernan & Andreou (2004). What Effects Does Classroom Separation Have on Twins' Behavior, Progress, and Reading Abilities? *Twin Research* v 7, n2 p115-124.