



## **Position Paper - Multiples of America Regarding School Placement of Multiple Birth Children**

*Prepared by Multiples of America (aka National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, Inc.)*

### **Introduction**

In the United States, the incidence of multiple births to the number of births was 32.6 per 1,000. For triplet and higher-order multiple births, the ratio was 93 per 100,000 births. Ten quadruplet or higher multiple births were reported in 2018. 123,536 multiple births were recorded in the United States in 2018. Twin birth rates declined among mothers aged 30 and over, with the largest declines among older mothers aged 40 and over from 2014-2018.

### **Statement of Purpose**

As a national, non-profit support organization for parents of twins and higher order multiples, Multiples of America, also known as the National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, Inc. (NOMOTC), is dedicated to supporting families of multiple birth children through education, research, and networking. In partnering with local support groups, health care providers, researchers, and educators, Multiples of America/NOMOTC endeavors to aid parents of multiples and to raise public awareness of the unique qualities of multiple birth families. This paper offers a set of general guidelines meant to engage educators and school support staff to become better acquainted with the special academic, social and psychological considerations affecting the education of multiple birth children.

### **Guidelines**

The general guidelines that follow are intended to be used at all levels of education and provide a broad framework within which educators may begin to dialogue on this topic.

### **Basic Principles**

Due to the ever-increasing number of multiple births in the United States, and due to the special academic, social and psychological considerations involving multiple birth children, educators and educational training institutions should consider the following:

- 1. Schools should provide an atmosphere which respects the close nature of the multiples' bond while at the same time encouraging individual abilities.** A basic knowledge of the psychology of multiple birth children, especially as it differs between identical and fraternal, is essential. An awareness of the depth of bonding between identical siblings and some same-sex fraternal will promote greater sensitivity to the needs of these children. An understanding that each multiple birth child is unique (even when the child is part of an identical set) will prompt the school's staff to recognize and encourage each child's abilities. Educators should learn to recognize each child in a set of multiples individually without resorting to extraordinary means, such as requiring identical twins to wear name tags, different color clothing, or different hair styles. The children should be called correctly by their own name and not simply referred to as "the twins." The classroom teachers should be able to recognize each child's particular academic strengths and weaknesses. No overt comparisons should be made between siblings in a multiple set. Instead, academic growth should be evaluated around a common set of benchmarks or standards.
- 2. Schools should maintain a flexible placement policy throughout the preschool and early elementary years.** Successful placement involves a collaborative decision which allows for ease of separation from the parent and the other multiple as well as for successful academic and social growth. Placement decisions should not center on a "one size fits all" policy. Decisions should not be made for the purpose of promoting the children's individuality or the teacher's convenience and ease in terms of name/face recognition. Consultation with parents will provide clearer insights into how to best serve the children's needs. As children enter into the late elementary years, their input can also provide information critical to decision making. Decisions should be reviewed annually to see if they are accomplishing the desired goals. In cases where a placement obviously creates a negative learning environment, mid-year changes should also be considered.

**3. When multiple birth children are enrolled in different classrooms at the same grade level, there is a need for a consistent approach to instruction and classroom management.** Teachers at the same grade level are encouraged to coordinate their efforts when a set of multiples is split between their classrooms. Preschool and primary-aged multiples can experience disappointment, confusion, or other negative emotions about school experiences as a result of teacher directed activities in one classroom which may be lacking in another. In these cases, jealousy and anger may be directed toward the sibling who is perceived to have the "better classroom." However, multiples who are separated in same grade classrooms can also become a catalyst for an added emphasis on team-teaching and use of a guaranteed curriculum or curriculum mapping. While this problem may lessen by the middle school years, teachers and administrators still need to recognize the very real problems which placement in separate classrooms can cause for multiple birth children.

**4. Educators should move with extreme caution when considering retention, acceleration, or designation in any one of the areas of exceptionality of one or more children in a set of multiples.** Psychological and social considerations involving the nature of the multiples' bond must receive equal weight with academic considerations. The effects of school retention, accelerations, or designation in any area of exceptionality are much greater on a multiple birth child since they may alter the sibling relationship in a profound manner. These effects can range from mild loss of self-esteem and confusion over the status of the siblings in the multiple-birth grouping to a deeper sense of loss of identity with the co-multiple(s) and feelings of anger and rejection. On the other hand, there is a definite need to separate the multiple birth issue from the issue of what is best for the individual child. As a result, the question of retention, acceleration, or designation in an area of exceptionality of a multiple birth child is highly complicated and needs to be approached with full consideration of all the possible benefits and harm which may result from the decision. Teachers need to be sensitive to the feelings and actions of all co-multiples and alert to possible problems for all of the children. If retention or acceleration is unavoidable, counseling services should be made available to all of the affected multiples.

**5. Teachers at the primary, middle, and high school levels should value parental input regarding the nature of the multiples' relationship.** Parents can be a valuable source of information and insight for teachers of multiples, since parents can usually provide information into the dynamics at work within the multiples' relationship at any given point in their development. Classroom observations, particularly if the multiples are in separate classrooms, will not provide educators with the comprehensive knowledge needed to make informed decisions, which may impact the children's social or psychological well-being. Teachers need to become aware of the level of dependency between the co-multiples and respond in a manner that makes each child comfortable. Adolescent multiples may be having difficulty with their relationship as each strives to establish an independent identity. Identical and fraternal relationships will differ, as will relationships between same sex and different sex fraternal.

**6. School districts should provide staff at all grade levels with professional development opportunities focused on the specialized concerns surrounding the education of multiple birth children.** Information and research regarding the education of multiple birth children is readily available through published and online resources. Schools should assist certified and classified staff in increasing knowledge in this area. Educators should seek out the latest research findings about the psychology and education of multiple birth children and incorporate these findings into their instructional methodologies. Certified and classified staff should familiarize themselves with the research, information, and services available through multiples-specific support organizations. Parents of older multiples can be another source of support for this expanding knowledge specific to multiple birth children.

**7. At the university level, schools of education should include research findings into the psychology of twins and higher order multiples in their curricula at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.** Attention should be paid to preparing teachers and administrators who are informed and sensitive to the needs of an increasing population of multiple birth children.

## **Conclusion**

The needs of an increasing population of multiple birth children should be considered at all levels of educational instruction. School policies, decisions and instruction which are based on a sound understanding of the psychology and social development of multiples will enable these children to move through the school years more happily and successfully. Any assumption that twins and higher order multiples have the same needs as singleton children can be damaging and counterproductive to the purpose of the educational institution. Appropriate research and literature exist which can provide a basis for a sensitive, knowledge-based approach to the education of multiple birth children. Parents and experts in the field should be considered valued resources for assisting school administrators and faculties with decisions affecting multiples.

## **GLOSSARY**

***co-twin or co-multiple*** -- one child of a multiple birth set

***fraternal*** -- dizygotic, or two egg twins resulting from the separate fertilization of two ova; fraternal siblings have their own unique genes and may be same sex or different sex.

***higher order multiples*** -- a multiple birth set consisting of three or more children (triplets, quadruplets, quintuplets, etc.)

***identical*** -- monozygotic, or one egg twins who share all their genes in common; they are always the same sex, have identical features, eye and hair color.

***multiple birth children*** -- a group of two (twins) or more (higher order) children who typically are conceived at the same time of the same parents, are born at the same time, and share a certain biological and genetic make-up.

***singleton*** -- a child who is not part of a multiple birth set.