

# Multiples and School Placement

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By Dr. Nadine Fitoussi & Dr. Angela Tatis

# Understanding school placement of multiples

“As a mother of triplets, I ask myself a lot of questions about the schooling of my girls. I’m looking for information from other parents, not theories or statistics.”

-Anonymous

“I feel as though there is a bias to separate twins that is based on opinion rather than research. The twin relationship is unique, and I think treating twins as ‘singletons’ does not help.”

-Anonymous

# Background for Interest in Topic:

Parents are often hearing from schools that twins *should* be separated. They learn all the supposed benefits, and you may even feel guilt in not following that guidance—feeling like “bad parents” if they don’t do “what is best for their kids.” - BUT WHAT IS BEST??

As parents of identical twins, we found ourselves questioning what we had heard from the schools. We watched our girls thrive in school together and we couldn’t understand why separation was considered necessary. Through Multiples of America, we discovered research supporting the benefits of keeping twins together in some cases — information that, surprisingly, was never covered in either of our professional training.

This year, our experiences inspired us to explore this topic in depth. As parents and professionals, we wanted to understand how families across the state are making these decisions and what outcomes they’ve observed.

# Looking at the Guidance/ Background from Multiples of America

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# Separation is Often the Norm:

Although there is usually no written school board policy to dictate separation, there is the tendency to automatically separate twins. School officials have a tendency to separate multiple-birth children simply because they are part of a multiple-birth set of children (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003).

## Jamison Grime (2008):

A mother who was interviewed expressed: “The principal said that we want them to go ahead and develop their individual personalities, be on their own, and again they could find zero research that said they won’t develop personalities if they are or aren’t together. I mean, they were able to give me no reason other than this is what we tell every year to every parent of twins.”

# Lack of Education:

The goal of a survey conducted by the International Council on Multiple Birth Organizations (ICOMBO) in 2019 was to help parents and school personnel be better informed when making decisions about school placement of multiples. The study found that the biggest issues were 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 Association booklet
- Discussions on a MBO Facebook group

## Klein (2017) Offered a Different Perspective:

“Respect for the twin bond is critical. Undermining the twin relationship by suggesting that it is just a normal sibling attachment will confuse twins who know how close they feel to their twin even if they are still unable to verbalize their attachment. Twins know through lived experiences how friendships are different and less intense than the bond they share with their brother or sister. When you undermine the twin relationship you will confuse young twins, leaving them unprepared for interacting socially at school or in after-school activities. (56)”

# Placement of Multiple Birth Children in School - Multiples of America

“The decision to separate my girls was based on very different academic abilities. One is average and one is gifted and talented. The one with age-appropriate skill compared herself to her sister leading to low self-esteem. Separation has been an excellent thing for them both.”

*-Anonymous*

## 10 Reasons to Separate Multiples in School

1. There are insensitive comparisons of multiples as a unit by teachers or other students.
2. One multiple is dominant over the other(s); one multiple may be overprotective of the other(s).
3. Multiples have different educational skill levels.
4. The multiples ask to be separated.
5. There is a delay in the language skills of the multiples so that they communicate only with each other and may use a unique language understandable only to them.
6. One of the multiples resents the lack of privacy from sharing a classroom.
7. Multiples would have the opportunity to flourish independently of one another and develop their unique personalities.
8. The multiples' extreme togetherness causes disruptive behavior.
9. The close relationship of the multiples impairs development of social relationships with others.
10. There is intense competition among the multiples.

# Placement of Multiple Birth Children in School - Multiples of America

“Being a solo mom, my main argument for them being in the same class is that I can’t split to attend meetings at school for each child. It is out of the question that I would have to choose which meeting or outing or activity to attend.”

*-Anonymous*

## 10 Reasons NOT to Separate Multiples in School

1. There are emotional issues at home (death, divorce, other).
2. Only one classroom is available.
3. Multiples have similar skill levels in a specialty school.
4. The multiples ask to be placed together.
5. “Two heads are better than one”— i.e., academic support of one another.
6. The multiples need the support of each other in emotionally adjusting to a new environment, especially when younger.
7. The multiples have trouble focusing in class when separated due to worry and concern about the co-multiple(s).
8. The teachers are widely different in teaching methods resulting in unequal education standards and assignments, causing some possible resentment or jealousy of each other.
9. Give teachers the opportunity to observe the multiple relationship.
10. There is a unique bond amongst multiples that provides security.

# Different Social Relationships for Identicals:

- Research shows that identical twins share a closer relationship than fraternal twins.
- Helen Koch, Ph.D. conducted a study in 1966 (age 5 and 6):
  - Identical twins showed less rivalry than other twin types.
  - Same-sex fraternal twins displayed the highest.
- Dr. Nancy L. Segal also conducted a study at the University of Chicago - identical and fraternal same-sex twins (age 7-10) worked jointly on a puzzle completion task.
  - identical twins demonstrated a higher degree of cooperation on this task
  - All twins were matched in general intelligence so that differences in ability and comprehension of the task did not explain the differences in the degree of cooperation. (Segal, 1984).

# Survey Results:

## Participating Clubs

MOTC Suffolk

Nassau County Parents of Multiples

Schenectady Mothers of Twins

West Side Suburban Mothers of Twins Club

Western New York Mothers of Multiples

Greater Rochester MOTC

Parents of Multiples of Central New York

Total Participants: 103 (with 77 completed surveys)

# Initial Class Placement

**Most twins are kept together at first**

- 76% same class

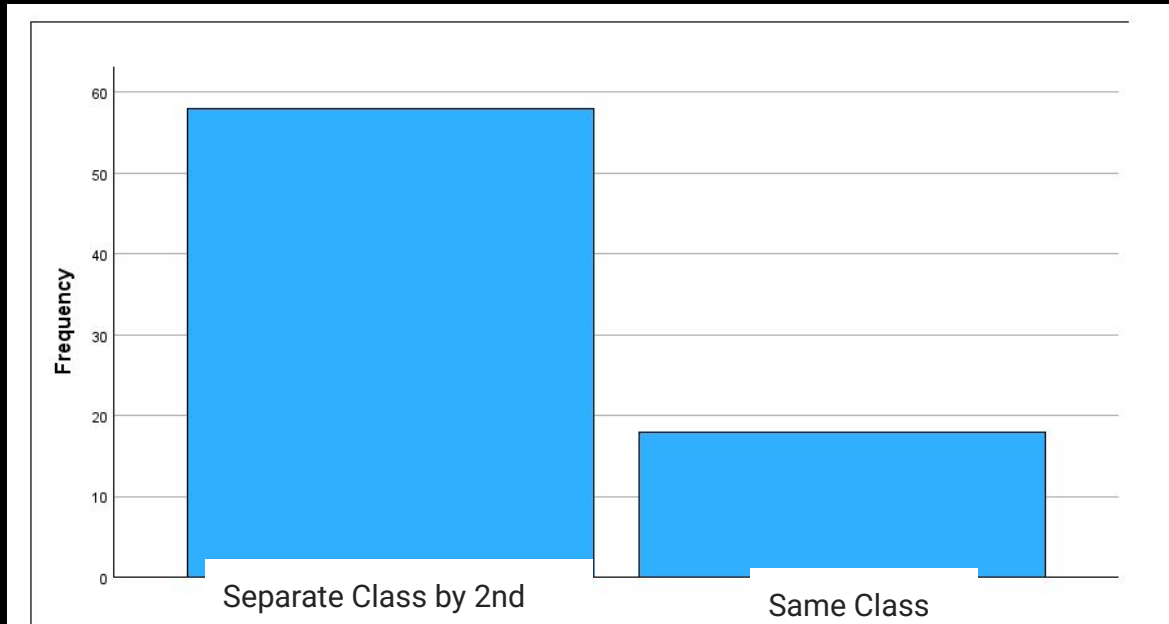
This is early on - Preschool, Pre-K, Kindergarten

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# Separation Happens Early

Peak Separation Time: Kindergarten & 1st grade

( 84% had been separated by 2nd grade )



# Who decides?

**Parents dominate decisions (guided by school recommendations)**

- ~73% parent-driven

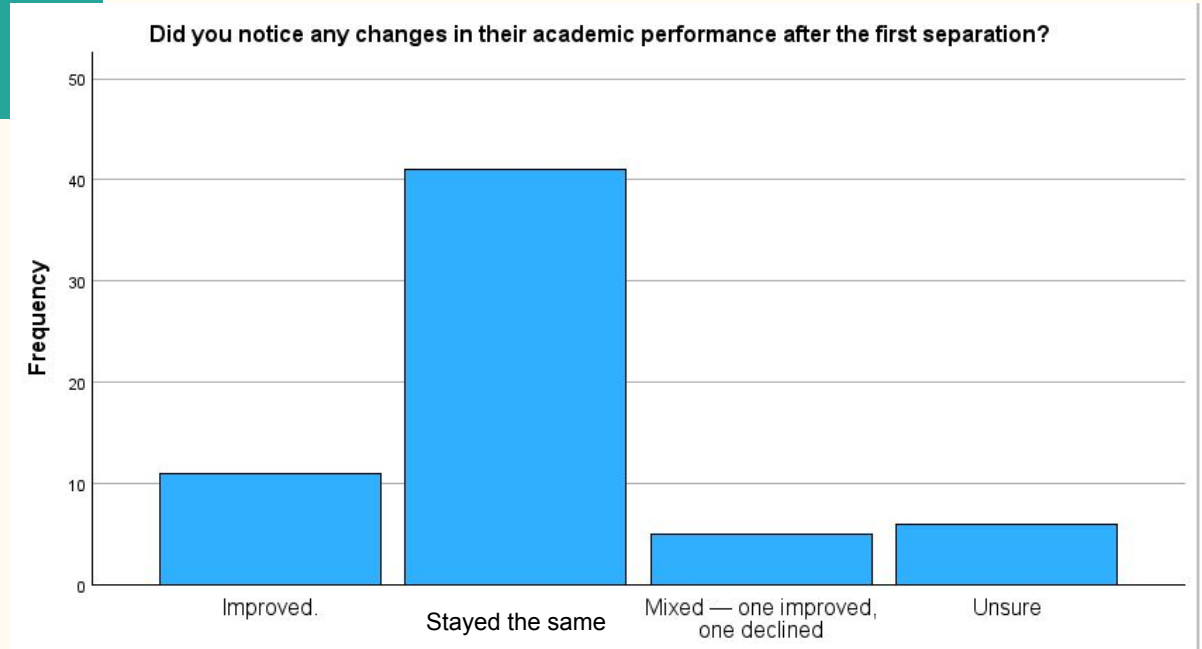
**Reasons differ clearly**

- Separate → independence/social growth
- Together → emotional support

# Academic Outcome of Separating

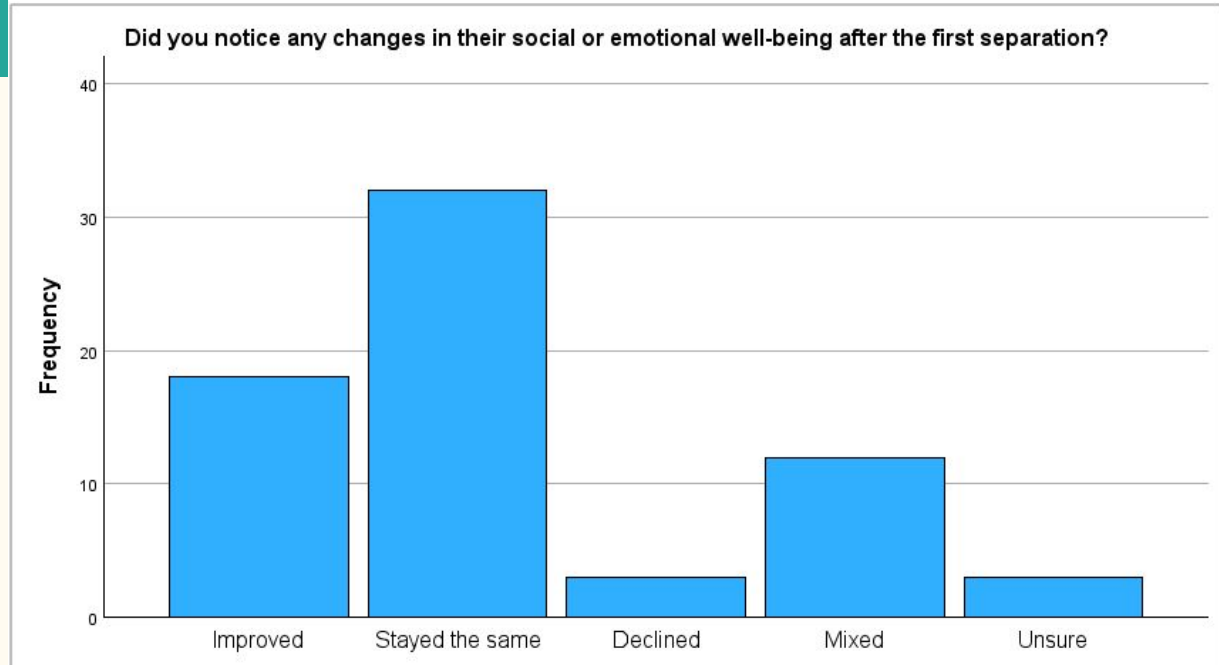
- Mostly unchanged

(Parents' perception)



# Emotional Outcome of Separating

- Mostly positive or neutral  
(Parents' perception)



# Outcome - College Bound?

Students are heading to college whether they have been together or separate - 10 out of the 11 multiple groups who were of college age had gone to college

- 7 out of 7 who stayed together longer
- 3 out of 4 who were separated from first enrollment

# Some Final Thoughts:

Most twins are being separated early in their schooling

BUT...

- Separation is not universally necessary
- It does not significantly improve academics
- Emotional outcomes are mixed

BUT - we don't have the kids' perspective

AND - Many outcome variables are difficult to study  
(especially with a smaller group)

- Academic changes/lack thereof could be due to the early age that multiples are separated

Therefore...Decisions should be individualized, not  
policy-driven

# References:

PLACEMENT OF MULTIPLE BIRTH CHILDREN IN SCHOOL A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS COPYRIGHT © 2020 Reprinted 2002,2004,2010,2015 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED ISBN: 1-880805-08-1

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