

State Representative Charlice Byrd met with me in October to listen to concerns about multiple birth placement in schools. She reviewed the wording from the Minnesota Twin bill. During the meeting she expressed concerns over the potential of this legislation in Georgia because it appears to be feel good legislation, she thinks there needs to be less legislation and smaller government rather than more legislation and governmental control, and because it appears to take away control from the local school boards. Given these concerns, she still advised me on how to best affect this legislation in the State Capitol (notes of which were given in the October GOMOM meeting) and also asked me to approach from a local level.

Rep. Byrd set up an appointment for us to meet with Cherokee County School Superintendent Frank Petruzielo to discuss the potential of a "Twin Bill" coming before the State Legislature in 2007.

On Monday, November 6, we had this meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, Dr. Petruzielo presented a few pages of research a staff member had done. The conclusion of this research reflected:

"Any policy should be left flexible with principals seeking a collaborative relationship with parents to place children in appropriate situations. Placement consideration should consider the age of the children (kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade) as a mitigating factor for younger children more than for older children. Rigid policies would also conflict with policies/practices that might group students by abilities, interests, or disabilities (many multiple birth children have language difficulties). Any policy treating the group of children as a "protected class," with rights or privileges that other children do not receive, should be reviewed by legal experts to avoid legal conflicts."

It is important to note that while Cherokee County does not have a specific policy toward multiple birth children; it is the practice of most of the principals to work with the parents to come up with the best solution for the children. Often times the principal will recommend separation but after talking with the parents they are willing to keep multiples together or to offer a trial period for the parents to see how separating multiples affects the children. This school year, there was a debate between parents and a principal about whether or not to separate a set of twins. It rose to Dr. Petruzielo's attention and he agreed with the parents (who wanted the children together) and gave the principal the opportunity to reverse his decision of separating the children, which the principal did reverse.

Dr. Petruzielo had several opinions and suggestions about the potential of a "twin bill", which are outlined below.

1. He **repeatedly** emphasized that any policy or bill needs to look out for the best interest of the individual children.
2. He is adamantly against, legislation that dictates from the State Capitol what school systems throughout the state should or should not do.
3. If there are going to mandates from the State, he recommends "the least onerous" way to create the mandates is to require each school system develop an individual policy that adheres specific guidelines. This could be done through the State School Superintendent's office rather than through the State Legislature. This has been done with many other issues and apparently works well.
4. He encourages all involved (parents, principals, school counselors, and teachers) to be involved collaboratively in the front end of school placement for multiples and to work flexibly to deal with the best interest of the child. He said it is important that if multiple birth children are in the same classroom that they be placed with a teacher that does not resent the fact that they are together. He thought it could be detrimental if the teacher (knowingly or unknowingly) sabotaged the children.

5. He said that counselors are in the best position to work with parents for the placement of children because they are generally the ones reviewing and placing children in particular classes.
6. Finally, he said that any policy or law that is created must ultimately let professionals decide what is best for the child not parents since the professionals know best. He cited several examples to reinforce this point.
  - a. Special education students are often in a special needs situation and while the parents make recommendations ultimately it is the professionals in the school systems that make the final decision.
  - b. An honor student and parent may request for the child to be removed from a strenuous honor program to allow time for sports. The professionals will listen to the request but ultimately make the decision.
  - c. A sick patient may go to the doctor and request a particular drug but the doctor has the ultimate say in whether to prescribe the drug or not. (It is my personal opinion that with physicians, patients are able to freely choose to get a second opinion. Whereas, with the public school system, if there is a disagreement with the professional's decision, parents must either move, home school or pay additional money for private education.)

While you may not agree with Rep. Byrd's reasoning for approaching this at a local level or not and you may not like or agree with the all of Dr. Petruzielo's recommendations, it is important to consider this feedback information and feedback when considering "Twin Legislation." Both were open to the idea of a formal policy and both recommended ways to approach a policy that might meet both concerns of parents of multiples and "the professionals". This is often times how politics works. One must look for a win-win solution. Both Rep. Byrd and Dr. Petruzielo are certainly helping look for this win-win solution without compromising personal convictions.

After the meeting, Representative Byrd suggested that it would be worthwhile to seek to the State School Superintendent's office regarding the issue of multiple placement. If any of you are interested in attending this meeting (assuming there actually is a meeting) and pursuing the issue further, please let me know so you can be included.

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