

WORKING TOGETHER

One of the skills we try to hone in our students from the very young grades is the ability to work together. Collaboration in work and play is an important part of functioning on a team, in a classroom, and as part of society. On Meet the Teachers Night, I was struck by a question from one parent who asked how many group projects the students would have to endure this year. The implication was that group projects can be problematic when the students have to rely on others or do not get along when working together.

A cognitive psychologist at Union College, Christopher Chabris, has done research on groups working on tasks together. The result was that the intelligence of individual members plays only a small role in the success of the group. The research (summarized in the Times Union, Oct. 11, 2010 and reported more fully in the online edition of *Science*) said that three things matter more than intelligence: the ability to read other people's emotions, giving everyone a chance to talk, and the number of women in the group. The researchers surmised that the reason for the last factor is that women tend to do better on social perception tests. They can read people better.

The research also said groups in which a few people dominated the conversation were less successful than those with a more equal distribution of conversation turn-taking. Groups in which the individuals had higher "social sensitivity" also did better.

In the past, research on cooperative learning or group collaboration has focused a group's ability to complete a single task. The latest discoveries are focused more on "collective intelligence."

We will continue to work on individual growth and development, group collaboration, and the "collective intelligence" of our students as we prepare them for the future.