For professional development to support teaching for understanding, schools must provide better resources to classroom teachers; align purposes, perceptions, and commitments; and sustain change. UW-Madison education professor Adam Gamoran says that supporting teaching for understanding calls on schools to increase their capacity for change. That requires developing new material resources and human and social resources as well, and allocating resources in ways that support teachers’ efforts.

Schools and districts enhance their capacity for change when they

- promote professional community among teachers,
- recast administrative roles as facilitative rather than managerial,
- allocate time for professional development during the school day, and
- provide materials and resources suitable to new teaching endeavors.

When schools and districts allow new roles to emerge, they foster growth of new human and social resources.

At some research sites, Gamoran’s research team found these elements of teacher professional communities:

- Teachers exhibit a shared sense of purpose in their attention to student thinking.
- Teachers emphasize student learning rather than administrative details and behavior management.
- Teachers collaborate rather than working in isolation.
- Teachers talk thoughtfully about the nature and practice of teaching.
- Teachers make their own teaching practices public rather than private and confined to the classroom.

This research is conducted as part of the National Center for Improving Student Learning in Mathematics and Science and is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.