A coaching model for special education teachers based on the medical concept of doctors' rounds is the highlight of a five-year, $11 million contract awarded to the Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) by the Utah State Office of Education.

According to David Forbush, associate director of TAESE and the project director for the Utah Professional Development and Technical Assistance (PD/TA) Network, special education teachers often don't have a colleague to team up with, so the concept of “digital educational rounds” was created. The idea was based on “Instructional Rounds in Education” by Richard Elmore and “Focus on Teaching” by Jim Knight book.

Only about 5 percent of teachers will implement what they learn in professional development activities without coaching, Forbush said, so coaching will make up a large part of the service provided by TAESE.

Each of the state’s five regions will have a coach/implementation specialist who will provide professional development and coaching for the teachers. In addition, the coaches will coordinate teachers within a region into teams, so the teachers can self-coach and strengthen each other.

Devices such as iPhones and iPads will be used to capture video of a teacher presenting a lesson. The video is sent to a web site (www.goreact.com) where colleagues can offer feedback in three different ways: by typing a comment in the chat box, by recording an audio comment, or by recording a how-to video. All comments are time-stamped, so the person being observed can match them to the exact moment in time about which the observers are commenting.

Every local education agency (LEA) in the state will be assessed for the level of support it requires to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), from universal support (less extensive) to intensive (more extensive, with specific interventions required).

All LEAs will get support, Forbush said, but what that support looks like will depend on what they need. The region that serves the Wasatch Front will focus mainly on charter schools, because most of the larger school districts already have coaches for their teachers.

Forbush said there are two main outcomes to be produced from the network: to reduce the level of support needed by the LEAs to meet IDEA requirements, and to produce better and measurable outcomes for students with disabilities.

Ten new professional staff members will be hired by TAESE for the project, including five coach/implementation specialists, two project specialists and an instructional designer who will produce live and recorded web-based trainings. The total amount of the contract is $11,151,178.

TAESE is a project of the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University.