Through the Center for High-Performing Schools, SEDL partners with schools and districts to improve teaching and learning and produce lasting changes in organizational cultures. Our staff members read the latest research and evaluate it in terms of its limitations, its applicability to different populations, the level of evidence it provides, and how it applies to the work we do.

Over the last two decades, research has clearly shown that professional development that involves a stand-alone presentation doesn’t really result in changed practice. In order to change practice, professional development should involve modeling and ongoing coaching for teachers. An excellent example of this approach is the work we are doing in New Mexico, where a SEDL staff member is working with a reading coordinator from the Southwest Regional Education Cooperative to bring research-based strategies into the classroom.

Every month, SEDL staff member Kathleen Theodore visits the schools and districts in the region with the regional reading coordinator from the cooperative. To introduce a new research-based strategy, Theodore conducts professional development sessions to model the strategy and talk with teachers about how they can implement the strategy in their classrooms. The next month, Theodore and the reading coordinator, along with the school-based reading coach if there is one, go into the classrooms and observe the teachers using the strategies with their students. Using a checklist that describes actions that indicate successful implementation of the strategy, they take notes on what they observe and use the information to provide feedback and coaching to the teacher later. Part of this process involves building the coaching skills of the regional reading coach and the school-based reading coaches.

As the work continues, additional strategies are identified and introduced based on data from student assessments. Because formal assessments are conducted relatively infrequently, Theodore provides a monthly report that describes what work was done during her visits, what progress has been made since her previous visit, the progress in the teachers’ implementation of the strategies, what strategies will be targeted in the next visit, and how those strategies are intended to address current issues. Through this work, the Center for High-Performing Schools brings research to practice by supporting teachers and reading coordinators and coaches to use research-based strategies to improve reading outcomes for their students.

For more information, please visit www.sedl.org. You may also contact the program director of SEDL’s Education Systems Support program Robin Jarvis at robin.jarvis@sedl.org or at 504-838-0606.