The Career and Technical Special Populations Training and Resource Education Center (CTSP Center) is a collaborative effort between the Family Development and Resource Management unit of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The CTSP Center provides career and technical education (CTE) teachers, and other educators, with access to resources for improving their knowledge regarding the education of students who have special needs.

Relevance
CTE programs enable post-secondary students to gain entry-level employment in a high-skill, high-wage job and/or to continue their education. Students with special needs in secondary CTE programs have been shown to have specific benefits. They are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to be employed, to have paid competitive jobs, and to work full-time after high school. Furthermore, students with special needs who are enrolled in CTE classrooms obtain paid competitive jobs more often, and feel more prepared to keep their jobs. With this record of success, students with special needs are often placed in CTE classes. As of 2015, TEA confirms that, on average, 25 percent of the 451,606 special education students in Texas are served through CTE.

With the increased enrollment, CTE teachers have several responsibilities. Specifically, CTE teachers have to plan and provide school-based instructional activities that correspond with the goals and objectives of students’ Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). In addition, they must provide instructional accommodations and modifications and ensure that all rights of the parents and students are respected. Finally, CTE teachers must know their responsibilities under federal and state laws. In fulfilling all of these requirements, CTE teachers — either due to a lack of educational background or experience — face difficulties and therefore need additional support to help them meet their instructional goals.

Response
The primary role of the CTSP Center is to assist CTE teachers, special education teachers, administrators, AgriLife Extension agents, and parents who work with special populations in Texas. The CTSP Center serves as an educational resource library and provides multimedia online courses and learning modules that address critical issues related to serving students with special needs. The CTSP Center website disseminates information through webcasts, newsletters, FAQs (frequently asked questions), online help desk, and links to external resources. In addition, resources specifically dedicated to educating parents are also made available on the site.
Results
Over the past nine years, the CTSP Center has made 4,094 educational contacts with CTE teachers, administrators, special educators, and parents. Additionally, the CTSP Center has been recognized as a Continuing Professional Education (CPE) provider by the Texas Education Agency. Learners from various parts of Texas have enrolled and/or completed the CTSP Center’s 20 online courses. In the 2014-2015 grant year, 10,326 educators completed the CTSP Online courses for CTE teachers and received 18,401 CPE credits, while a total of 185,458 visits to the Career and Technical Special Populations website were logged with 9,761 repeat visitors. Resources that were typically downloaded or accessed included webcasts, newsletters and learning module materials (total: 50,046).

Feedback on the CTSP Center’s free services and resources has been positive. Evaluation data from workshops, presentations and instructional materials have shown that participants gained knowledge and planned to apply it to their daily educational activities.

References for this brief are available upon request.