

METRO

BACK TO SCHOOL

Tourette's syndrome hurt Brad Cohen as student, not as teacher

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As a child in St. Louis, Brad Cohen spent more time in the principal's office than the classroom.

His teachers didn't know why he yelped, shrieked and twitched all day long.

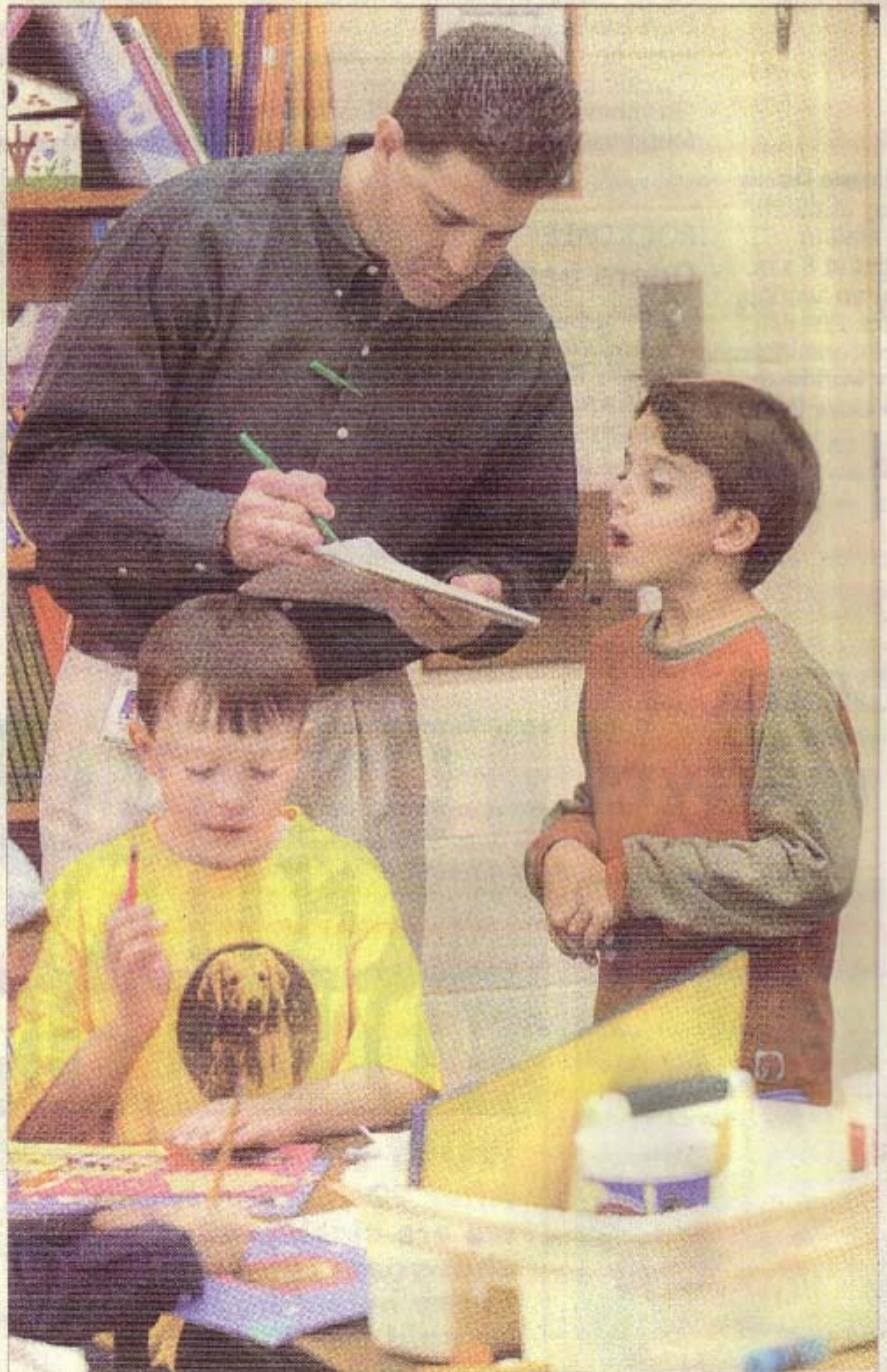
They didn't understand Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder that causes involuntary movements and sounds.

"Tourette's syndrome is my best friend. It goes with me everywhere I go. It has made me who I am and driven my desire to teach."

BRAD COHEN
Mountain View
Elementary School

Diagnosed at 13, Cohen had no friends. "Who wanted to be friends with the kid who made noises?" he said. Nowadays, Cohen spends plenty of time in the principal's office — at Mountain View Elementary School in Cobb County, conferring with his boss, Peggy Hollis. Once scorned by teachers, Cohen became one. "He had to have some mighty strong character to walk through that door," said Hollis, who remembers when Cohen interviewed with the Cobb school district six years ago. "There are people who have disabilities they can mask. When it's audible you cannot hide."

Mountain View teachers wondered how students would react, but after a few weeks Cohen's tics blended with familiar schoolhouse sounds of feet marching through hallways, children's chatter and the whistle that says it's time to come in from recess.



ANDY SHARP / Staff

His **Cobb County** students have gotten used to involuntary twitches by **Mountain View Elementary School** teacher Brad Cohen, who suffers from Tourette's syndrome, so it's business as usual when he instructs