

Attorney fights for rights of special ed. kids

By ANDREW COEN

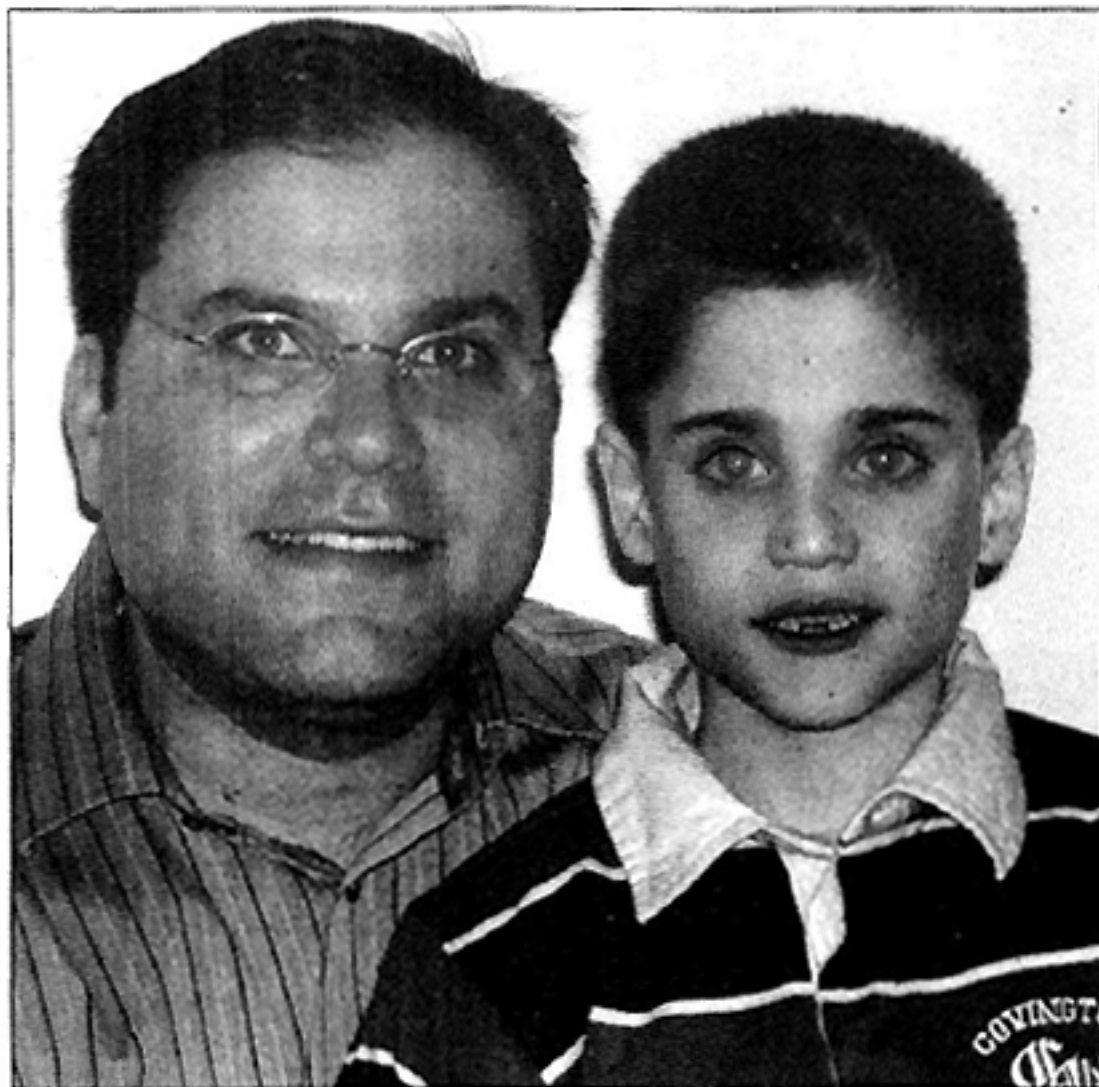
Joseph Fein's son, Brett, was born prematurely, and the family was told there was a chance he would not be able to walk. But Brett has prospered in school, thanks to special-educational services he has received.

Fein, an attorney and a Lawrence resident, had to fight hard for many of those services, which inspired him to start his own law practice specializing in the representation of children and adolescents with learning and physical disabilities.

"Only somebody who has a special-needs child really can do something like this," said Fein, whose law practice is in Hewlett. "If you haven't walked down the path that these parents are walking, if you haven't experienced the 2-in-the-morning emotional breakdowns, it's difficult to know how a parent feels. You have to know how to talk to them and to feel compassion for them."

Fein is one of few attorneys in the field representing the needs of special-education students. "There aren't a lot of people who practice in this area of law, but those of us who do know how important it is, because it really makes a difference in the life of a child," said Fein, who grew up in Rockland County and graduated from Cardozo Law School. He knows it has made a big difference in the life of his child, who attends a Long Island private school.

Before he started his new practice in February, Fein was an assistant district attorney in Queens who tried a range of cases before grand juries and regular juries.



JOSEPH AND BRETT FEIN.

He was also the chief litigator for the New York City Off-Track Betting Corporation.

Fein has spent the past five years giving advice to other parents of children with

learning disabilities and special needs, and helping them navigate the school system in order to help them get the appropriate educational services for their kids. "The experi-

ence of advocating on behalf of my own special child and the experience of helping other similarly situated parents convinced me that there is a real need for a legal partner to help parents help their children," he said. "Since your child's educational needs may be different than those of other children, the necessity for legal representation is imperative."

Fein said he does not want to pick fights with school districts when advocating for some students' particular needs. "My goal is to avoid confrontation with the school districts by demonstrating, through proper evaluations by experts, what is appropriate for your child," he said. "My philosophy is that the earlier we start, the better the chance that your child will succeed at reaching his or her fullest potential."

Fein advocates for students with different types of learning disabilities, not just severe disabilities. "I have parents whose children are just looking for speech therapy or are just looking for some occupational therapy and who have called me and asked me to get involved on their behalf," he said. "I have children who are severely handicapped to the point where they are in wheelchairs or have special walkers. My practice really covers a lot of different situations."

Half his clients thus far consist of public-school parents, and the other half are private-school parents. "Special education, special needs doesn't discriminate," said Fein. "[The parents] all have one desire, and that is their [child's well-being]."

For further information on Fein's practice, call (516) 792-9119, or e-mail him at JosephFein@yahoo.com.