



Dr. Elliot Kraut

Administrator

Contacted by Jackie Abrams

April 24, 2015

Elliot Kraut was born in 1942 in New York City and grew up in Danbury, Connecticut. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Economics. He worked for the U.S. Department of Labor and then returned to PENN and got a master degree in Education. He started his teaching career at Staples High School in 1965 and became the Chair of the Social Studies Department in 1989. He retired in 2004 and now lives in Vermont.

What were you doing on the morning of Tuesday, 9/11? How did you learn of the attack? How did you react immediately?

At the time of the attack I was chair of the committee that developed the plans for the new school building. The principal, Gloria Rakovic, the Science Department Chair, and I were visiting Ossining High School to look over their new science labs. I remember, as we were walking down a hall, leaving the school, some teacher ran into the hall crying that the World Trade Center was attacked. We quickly got to our car and headed back to Westport. Gloria phoned ahead to talk with the administrators at the school. We drove quickly, listening to the radio, not really, I think, comprehending what was going on.

When you were made aware of the circumstances, did you contact other administrators at the Westport schools?

What was the conversation like? Was the conversation more official or emotional?

Since I was out of the building, I was not privy to any meetings. I remember that there was very little conversation in the car as we were returning to Staples.

Was there an announcement made to the student body? What did it say?

I was out of the building and I do not remember.

Teachers we interviewed said once the information started to get passed around, the computers were taken offline and the TVs were turned off. How did that impact the rest of the day?

Everyone became aware of the situation and it was discussed in classes, in the halls and in offices among teachers and with students. The idea was to continue as a normal day. That was impossible, but people remained calm.

How did the school react? How did the district react? Were the schools shut down? If so, for how many days?

To the best of my knowledge, schools went on as normal.

Do you know how many Staples students and/or families were affected by the attacks? Did you know of anyone personally who was directly affected by the attacks?

No.

How did you, as a leader in the school district, guide the students, staff and the community?

When we returned to school I immediately went to my office and called my wife to see how she was. Then I let students use my office phone to call home or their parent(s) in NYC to check on them. I spent most of my time walking the halls talking to students and teachers, sharing what little I knew and reassuring them.

What did you think about terrorism before the attacks? What do you think now? How did the attack impact your life? Is there anything else you think we should know on how the attacks impacted you?

I/We did not think much about terrorism. I remember talking with students and friends later saying, "Our lives will never be the same."