

# Safe to Learn

About Ada Rosario Dolch - Background updated June 2016

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## Q &A with Ada Rosario Dolch

### Why did you decide to give your book away to all principals in America?

Lessons learned must be shared. This is like a good lesson plan; you just give it away. Every time I read of another horrid and vicious attack on a school campus, I often wonder if it could have been prevented. The more we plan and prepare for “any” possibility, the better prepared we will be in the event of “any” level of emergency.

### What message would you like to share with all principals?

**Ada’s reply to all principals:** “There are so many lessons to carry forward, but the core values are always there. I trust there are nuggets within my story that you will consider for your own schools. In light of the continuous vicious attack on schools, it is critical that we consider every possible angle leading to safety and security in the entire learning community. Ultimately, once the incident is over, there is a multiplicity of issues that must be dealt with that few consider. Perhaps my thoughts within these pages will help deepen your communications and preparedness. And then, remember to share, and share again with everyone in your community. The better prepared you are today, the better prepared you will be tomorrow if a disaster knocks on your door.”



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## Why did you decide to write “Principles for Principals, Leading the Way to School Safety”?

For years I performed reviews of the role of the school leaders and school staff relating to school safety. After many conversations and presentations on safety and security, I felt it was time to put my thoughts on paper to perhaps reach a larger audience. These issues can no longer be left to chance. We spend an inordinate amount of time on reading, writing, arithmetic, nutrition, movement, and socialization, yet we spend little time thinking about making a safe environment for our students and staff so that all of daily educational daily activities can take place without fear or danger. A one-day conversation misses the mark if we are to concern ourselves with the safety and security of all. This must be daily activity. The horrid events that continue to plague our schools **must** compel us to actively engage our entire school community, to ensure everyone’s safety and welfare. Though the events of September 11, 2001 appear to have taken place ages ago, I believe the lessons learned before, during and after, that turning point in our history need to be shared more effectively and more frequently.

## What do you hope the principals and assistant principals and members of the school response teams will discover from your book?

They should awaken to the fact that the process is a daily duty – practice, practice, practice. Building trust and communication is the key. There is no magic bullet. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. It’s a matter of seriously and deeply engaging in the deeper conversations, while seeking the means to best ensure the safety and security of an entire school community.



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## About Ada Rosario Dolch

Ada Rosario Dolch served as the principal of the High School for Leadership and Public Service in lower Manhattan for six years before she and her staff confronted their ultimate challenge on September 11, 2001. Her fourteen-story high school was right at the heart of the disaster, just two blocks from the south tower of the World Trade Center. In emergencies, students and staff were to remain in the building or evacuate to the World Trade Center. The school's safety plan required these limited choices. With fire and debris raining down outside of the school windows, Ada Dolch made the decision to evacuate instead to Battery Park, despite the District officials asking, "Why are you evacuating?"

The District continued to order Ada to remain with her students and staff in the school. Ada effectively responded to the crisis because she had planned and prepared, which enabled sound on-the-spot decision-making. This saved all of those she was responsible to protect.

Her reflections of leadership serve as a powerful learning tool for superintendents, principals, teachers, and students in the creation of their own safety plans. Her experience calls everyone involved in school safety to learn and take action.

Ada Rosario Dolch started her career shaping NYC public school students into leaders, thinkers, and doers. She taught at John Dewey High School for over thirteen years and worked for the Brooklyn High School Superintendent for two years before assuming the role of principal at the High School for Leadership and Public Service, where she served from 1995 to 2004. She was approached by the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA), (the union that represents all school leaders in New York City schools), to join the Supervisory Support Team. From 2007 to 2010, Ada was the Executive Director for the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), a non-profit organization of the CSA providing professional development for all school leaders in NYC.



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## Page 2 – More About Ada Rosario Dolch

At present, Ada Dolch is a professional development and leadership consultant. She continues to champion the importance of safety, security and preparedness in all schools, as her commitment making a better world. She also meets and speaks with students and educators who visit the World Tribute Center in New York.



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Sample Page - Principles for Principals, Leading the Way to School Safety

## There Must Be Hope

"Keep kids safe and they will be able to learn.  
Every single member of my staff has to have the very same commitment.  
That's how I operated before, during and after 9/11."  
Ada Rosario Dolch



### Ada Rosario Dolch's Story

Unfortunately I often feel that the event of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the effect this terror had on children across our nation, has been forgotten. There is a sense of personal comfort when I hear that there are educators who have chosen not to forget and instead are working diligently to ensure that - schools are better prepared should anything like the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> were to happen again.

Even today, the terror of 9/11 is still a vivid memory for me. As I share my story with you I want you to keep in mind the many instantaneous decisions that were made! I want you to ask yourself, "What might my decision(s) be when under fire? How might I tackle a similar situation?"



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## Sample Page - Principles for Principals, Leading the Way to School Safety Principles for Principals, Leading the Way to School Safety (TOC)

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## Reflections by School Principals and AP Principles for Principals, Leading the Way to School Safety

"I just finished reading Ada's book, it is amazing! It rekindled my commitment to leadership and service to our children, schools, communities, students, parents, educators, leaders, every citizen!"

~ Kay Karr, Retired Superintendent, Texas and President of Responsive Learning

## Links

### Reflections from Principals and Assistant Principals about "Principles for Principals, Leading the Way to School Safety"

- [The Day After 9/11](#)
- [Observations](#)
- [Be Prepared and Be a Leader](#)
- [Communication Is Key](#)
- [New Safety Check List](#)
- [It's Not a Matter of "if" but "when"](#)

### Link to Information on the Safe to Learn Web Site

- **About Leading the Way to School Safety**  
<http://www.safetolearn.com/leading-the-way-to-school-safety.html>
- **Link to Reflections Directory** <http://www.safetolearn.com/reflections.html>
- **About Ada Rosario Dolch - Author, Educator & Contributor**  
<http://www.safetolearn.com/author-ada-rosario-dolch.html>
- **To purchase a copy of *Principles for Principals – Leading the Way to School Safety*, and support the Safe to Learn community,**  
[\(LINK TO STORE PAGE\)](#)



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