



Joel Wirth, former CFO, Chandler Unified School District

The Trust

in partnership with the Alliance and SCIP

In 2019, the Trust will be releasing a series of stories to remind our members of the Trust's mission, how we help Arizona school districts, and what sets us apart from typical insurers.

In this first story, we talk with Joel Wirth, former CFO of Chandler Unified School District, who was involved with the Trust at its inception in 1986, and for many years thereafter as a Trust board member.

The Trust was formed out of necessity when property and liability rates skyrocketed for public entities. With the passage of public entity pooling legislation in Arizona, the opportunity emerged for school districts to join together to self-insure their property and liability risks.

It was not all smooth sailing from the start. As Mr. Wirth recalls, the Trust began as a small pool with only a few members. There was little cash available, and the Arizona Department of Insurance (DOI) threatened to shut down the fledgling pool. Mr. Wirth and other early supporters met with DOI to talk through necessary steps for survival. The Trust got a reprieve when American Reinsurance decided to take a chance on backing the new pool's risks. Mr. Wirth and other early supporters then began meeting with school boards across the state, encouraging them to join.

The Trust has grown dramatically since those early days. Today, it serves 249 districts and community colleges, making it one of the largest public entity pools in the United States. Mr. Wirth reminisced, though, that some of the first members to join the Trust were small districts in rural parts of the state. These districts tended to have limited funding and little or no means to make necessary repairs and improvements. Inevitably, this meant insurance claims. The Trust was there to process and pay those claims.

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“Some districts who would never be able to get a new roof, got a new roof,” said Mr. Wirth. “Statewide, the Trust fixed everything.”

As the pool grew and its reach extended throughout the state, its influence increased. While some of the smaller, rural districts may have seen most of the initial benefit, it wasn't long before districts of all sizes and varieties saw the advantages of becoming members.

“The Trust exists to help take care of the financial needs of school districts. It looks for reasons to fix things, where traditional insurance looks for reasons not to fix things.” Mr. Wirth added.

As the Trust has grown over the past 33 years, it has also evolved from a provider of property and liability coverages to a full-service risk management partner. Its coverages have grown over the years as member needs have evolved, and so too have the programs and services it offers to districts. Some noteworthy examples include the Risk Management Summit, Trust/NAU Leadership Academy, Hearing Officer Training, premise inspections, cyber security services, and the Trust Loyalty Credit.

The Trust is proud of its history, and will continue to evolve as member needs do. Whatever the future brings, though, the Trust will stay true to its central purpose: keeping schools and students safe, reducing losses, and providing affordable indemnity protection for all districts, no matter their size or location.