

*“From the Academy I felt ready to be proactive rather than reactive; but knew that when I had to be reactive, I could react well.”*



*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 second installment, we talk with John Baracy, former superintendent of Scottsdale Unified School District (SUSD), about the Trust/NAU Leadership Academy. (More information on the Academy appears at the end of this article.)

Mr. Baracy worked in education for 38 years, capping his career with a four-year stint as superintendent of SUSD. During his first year in that position, he attended the Trust/NAU Leadership Academy in June in Flagstaff: “From the Academy I felt ready to be proactive rather than reactive; but knew that when I had to be reactive, I could react well.”

One of the emerging issues covered during the Academy that year was hazing. A couple of weeks after attending, Mr. Baracy received a call from his assistant superintendent informing him that a student’s parent was in the district office with a complaint of hazing at an out-of-town camp. As a result of the training received at the Academy, Mr. Baracy was confident in his response. He worked with Trust-provided counsel and knew what to say, what not to say, and whom to talk to. That was particularly important in this instance, as reporters were aware of the story and were very aggressive in pursuing it. But Mr. Baracy had received the guidance and training he needed to handle the situation adeptly.

Coincidentally, the district had a bond issue in the upcoming election, the largest in the state at the time. Mr. Baracy believes that had the hazing incident not been resolved smoothly, the bond could have been at risk of a “no” vote. In the end, the bond measure passed.

Today, Mr. Baracy credits the Trust/NAU Leadership Academy for the outcome of the hazing incident—a positive result for the student and a positive result for the district. “Our exposure would have been far greater if I had not been at the Academy. Our exposure, both financial and for our reputation and goodwill, was minimized because our staff was well trained.”

This is just one example of how the Trust’s Leadership Academy program has benefited not just Mr. Baracy and SUSD, but many districts and their leaders around the state.

The Trust Leadership Academy was founded in 2005 under the direction of Dr. William Wright.

The Academy was established as a platform for training current and future public school administrators on critical risk management issues by using real scenarios from Arizona school districts.

NAU faculty teach sessions on leadership, and lawyers walk participants through legal scenarios in a case study format. There have been 30 Academy sessions over the past 14 years.

The Trust/NAU Leadership Academy is held in Flagstaff in June and in Tubac in September.

*“The Trust/NAU Leadership Academy exists to share and teach real-life experiences so that its members can more effectively lead and manage their districts in times of legal crisis.”*

*-Matthew Wright, Trust Chief Legal Counsel*