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BOTH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES PRAISE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN FINAL DEBATE **One Thing They Agree on: High-Quality Charters are Making a Difference for Students**

PHOENIX, AZ (October 16, 2008) - It was the last question of the 2008 Presidential debates posed to the candidates. In education, "we trail most the countries of the world" what do you intend to do about it?" Senators John McCain and Barack Obama agreed: High-quality charter schools are making a difference for students and need to be expanded.

"Charter schools aren't the only answer, but they're providing competition," said Senator McCain. "Choice and competition amongst schools is one of the key elements that's already been proven in places like New Orleans and New York City and other places, where we have charter schools, where we take good teachers and we reward them and promote them." Concurring with McCain, Obama cited his long support for public charter schools: "I doubled the number of charter schools in Illinois despite some reservations from teachers unions. I think it's important to foster competition inside the public schools."

In Arizona, more than 100,000 students are enrolled in 475 charter schools in Arizona. According to recent survey results, 60 percent of our charter schools have waiting lists. To meet this demand, more quality charter schools have, and continue to open. In the 2008 school year, 34 new charter schools opened. In 2009, 21 completed applications are pending before the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools.

"Arizona is one of the nation's leaders in offering quality charter schools to Arizona's public school students, and we welcome the presidential focus on choice and accountability. Successful charter schools deserve federal support," said Eileen B. Sigmund, chief executive officer of the Arizona Charter Schools Association. "Both Presidential campaigns focus on K-12 student achievement, which is great for Arizona public students who are chronically underfunded by our political leaders. As charters expand nationwide public funding should keep pace with the growth."

On a national level, more than 1.3 million students are enrolled in 4,300 public charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Fueling their popularity, new studies are showing that charter schools are increasing student achievement. A recent analysis of charter achievement reports found that 31 of 40 studies since 2001 have reported overall gains in charter schools greater than those in comparable district-run public schools.

Charter schools are a unique education reform begun just 17 years ago and are now at the forefront of efforts to strengthen public education. They are independent public schools, free to innovate and held accountable by their authorizers for improved student achievement. They offer open enrollment to all students. As evidence of their popularity, the total number of students on charter school waiting lists has grown to over 350,000 nationally.

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About The Arizona Charter Schools Association

The Arizona Charter Schools Association is the membership and professional organization serving nearly 70 percent of the 475 charter schools in Arizona. With a common goal of providing the best in free, public education for Arizona's children, the Association works alongside schools, parents, policymakers and the media, continuously advocating for quality schools and increasing educational options across our state. We are dedicated to high student achievement and aggressively seek to provide the best in comprehensive support and services to Arizona's charter schools. For more information, visit www.azcharters.org or call 602.944.0644 ext. 304.