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ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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ARIZONA A NATIONAL LEADER IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

(PHOENIX, Az) ... Arizona, which just passed legislation authorizing charter schools last summer, has become a national leader in the charter schools movement. After its first year of implementation, there are 51 charter schools in Arizona, a number surpassed only by California. And interest is growing. We have received more than 170 requests for a Statement of Intent, the first step in the 1995-96 charter application process.

"The Arizona charter school legislation has been a model for other states," said Lisa Graham, State Supt. of Public Instruction. "It provides for a great deal of innovation and flexibility to tailor programs, and it requires that students meet, and hopefully exceed, the same academic standards set for all Arizona public schools.

"Charter schools are a new breed of public schools that provide another option for students and parents in Arizona's system of schools," Graham continued. "They have also created wonderful opportunities for businesses and communities to partner with educators in designing new schools."

There is a high degree of accountability and scrutiny built into Arizona's charter school program. "Charter schools enjoy some freedoms for innovative teaching methods, but they can lose their charters at any time if they fail to show academic achievement of their students, do not operate in a fiscally sound manner, or do not meet other stipulations in their five-year contract," Graham continued.

A charter school is a public school that is designed to improve student academic achievement in a unique or innovative way. Many charter school programs offer specialized approaches to teaching to provide the best education for each individual student. For example, some charter schools have an emphasis on the performing arts while others strive to attract students who may be at-risk of dropping out or those who want an education more founded in the "basics".

Charter schools are held to the same requirements common to all other public schools in regards to health, safety, civil rights, insurance and special education. They must also adhere to the same procurement and Uniform System of Financial Records (USFR).

Here are some basic facts about Arizona's charter schools.

- 51 chartered to date; 25 by the State Board for Charter Schools; 21 by the State Board of Education; and 5 by school districts
- 46 of these schools are expected to be open for the 1995-96 academic year
- These charter schools are expected to serve approximately 6,200 students
- 32 schools are located in Maricopa County; 2 schools are in Tucson
- Non-metro communities being served by charter schools include Ash Fork, Chino Valley, Flagstaff, Kingman, Nogales, Page, Payson, Prescott, Sedona, Show Low, Springerville, St. Johns, Tuba City, Winslow and Yuma
- 22 of the schools have been established by educators; the remainder by businesses, community-based organizations, school districts or parents
- 27 of the schools are totally new
- 13 of the schools were existing private schools that have applied for charter status
- 2 of the schools were Bureau of Indian Affairs schools
- 9 of the schools existed as a community-based program (i.e. CALL-A-TEEN) before applying to become a charter school