SCHOOL AUTONOMY GUIDANCE

There is a growing body of research nationally validating the effects of educator autonomy on student achievement. SAISD's Annual Call for Quality Schools seeks to empower educators with increased decision-making authority at the campus level to manage talent, time, and resources as needed to better serve their individual communities. The SAISD Board of Trustees will provide approved charter applicants with policy waivers to the fullest extent of the law and in accordance with Policy EL(LOCAL).

The chart below describes some of the most common and impactful autonomies that a school may seek. It is by no means a finite list. Please reach out to the Office of Innovation if you have any questions or would like to discuss autonomy in more detail.

In-district charter applicants must include in the application the rationale for why the school is requesting each autonomy, and how the autonomy will help the school achieve its mission, overcome key challenges, and improve student outcomes. Applicants requesting autonomies will be expected to propose standards that are equal to or greater than the district standards.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Type of Autonomy	Description
Curriculum and Assessment	• Select or create your own school curriculum and assessments (without the ability to opt out of mandatory state and federal assessments, where applicable). • Select student textbooks or supplies other than those recommended or required by the district.
Grade Reporting and Placement	• Create your own grade reporting system, such as standards-based grading, and/or deviate from the standard nine-week cycle in grade reporting. • Set more rigorous promotion and graduation requirements.
Lesson Plans	• Write lesson plans in a manner that you determine to be the most effective for your campus.
Schedule and Calendar	• Create your own school schedule and calendar, which may or may not be the same as the general SAISD school schedule and calendar, provided that any schedule or calendar changes that increase costs to the district will require district approval.
Teacher Conference Periods	• Set your own guidelines on teacher conference periods in order to utilize that time most effectively for teacher support, staff collaboration, and student learning.

OPERATIONS

Type of Autonomy	Description
Budget	• Develop your own school budget and allocate your school's funds however you see appropriate (in accordance with state and district comparability requirements). • Provide additional staff compensation for extended time, responsibilities, or performance. If additional compensation is proposed, please describe any resulting trade offs (e.g., increasing resources for X will decrease resources for Y.) If the additional compensation increases the school's overall budget, such compensation must either by approved by the district or supported by external fundraising. • Convert staff positions to dollars for your campus if such positions are not needed.
District and Vendor Services	• Opt out of district services and receive dollars to your school budget instead. • Choose the operational services that your school requires. • Select your own service vendors that may or may not be approved by the district. • Utilize your campus funds to purchase certain discretionary services from the district (e.g., technology support, facilities maintenance, professional development, etc.)

SCHOOL CULTURE & IDENTITY

Type of Autonomy	Description
Campus Leadership Team (CLT)	• Choose a different structure for site-based decision-making other than the CLT, provided that your proposed structure has equal to or greater levels of parent and community involvement than the amount required by state law and district policy.
Campus Organization	• Organize your school in a different way, such as dividing the campus into thematic academies that fit into an anchor model or creating small learning communities or "houses". Please note that district enrollment policy and procedure applies to any such campus reorganization and those requirements cannot be waived.
Student Discipline	• Institute restorative practices or another research-based student discipline program. • Utilize different programs and practices to support your school's approach to student discipline.

TALENT

Type of Autonomy	Description
Professional Development	• Determine how much time to dedicate to professional development and how staff use their professional development time. • Opt in or out of district professional development offerings.

	● Select your own professional development vendors. ● Establish formal relationships with vetted providers by contract or MOU.
Recruitment and Hiring	● Recruit and interview candidates from inside and outside of the district. ● Create your own hiring process, including your own job descriptions, interview questions and selection criteria, provided that all candidates must complete legally required background checks through the district. ● Select and hire candidates of your choice.
Staffing Plans	● Choose the type and number of positions on your campus. ● Revise existing roles and/or create new roles (e.g., hybrid teacher/administrative positions, specialists in specific programs, or new teaching positions). ● Distribute your budget across various types of positions. ● Determine non-teaching duties that teachers are required to perform. ● Change the number, time or place of parent-teacher meetings.
Teacher Certification	● Choose to hire qualified teachers who may not have state-mandated teaching certificates.

NOTES

Enrollment and MAP Testing:

- SAISD policy and procedure on student enrollment and school choice, including but limited to FDB(LOCAL) and F51, will apply to all in-district charters and will not be waived.
- All in-district charters will conduct MAP testing in the same manner as other district schools.

Charter Law. In accordance with Texas Education Code Sec. 12.056, laws related to the following subject areas are applicable to all in-district charters and cannot be waived:

- Criminal offenses;
- PEIMS reporting;
- Criminal history records;
- High school graduation program, credits and endorsements;
- Special education programs;
- Bilingual education;
- Prekindergarten programs;
- Extracurricular activities (in regards to UIL, first aid, and steroid use);
- Health and safety; and
- Public school accountability.