



Growing Compassionate Systems Change

Ten Years of Transforming Education
Systems for Human Flourishing

Center for Systems Awareness

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AT A GLANCE



This report highlights the reach and influence that the Compassionate Systems Framework, created and disseminated by the Center for Systems Awareness, has had over the last ten years. The Compassionate Systems Framework is an orientation and approach that helps individuals and organizations grow long-lasting, self-reinforcing change within and around them, integrating contemplative practices, compassion cultivation, the science of learning and development, and principles of systems dynamics. This section summarizes the most important points and numbers.



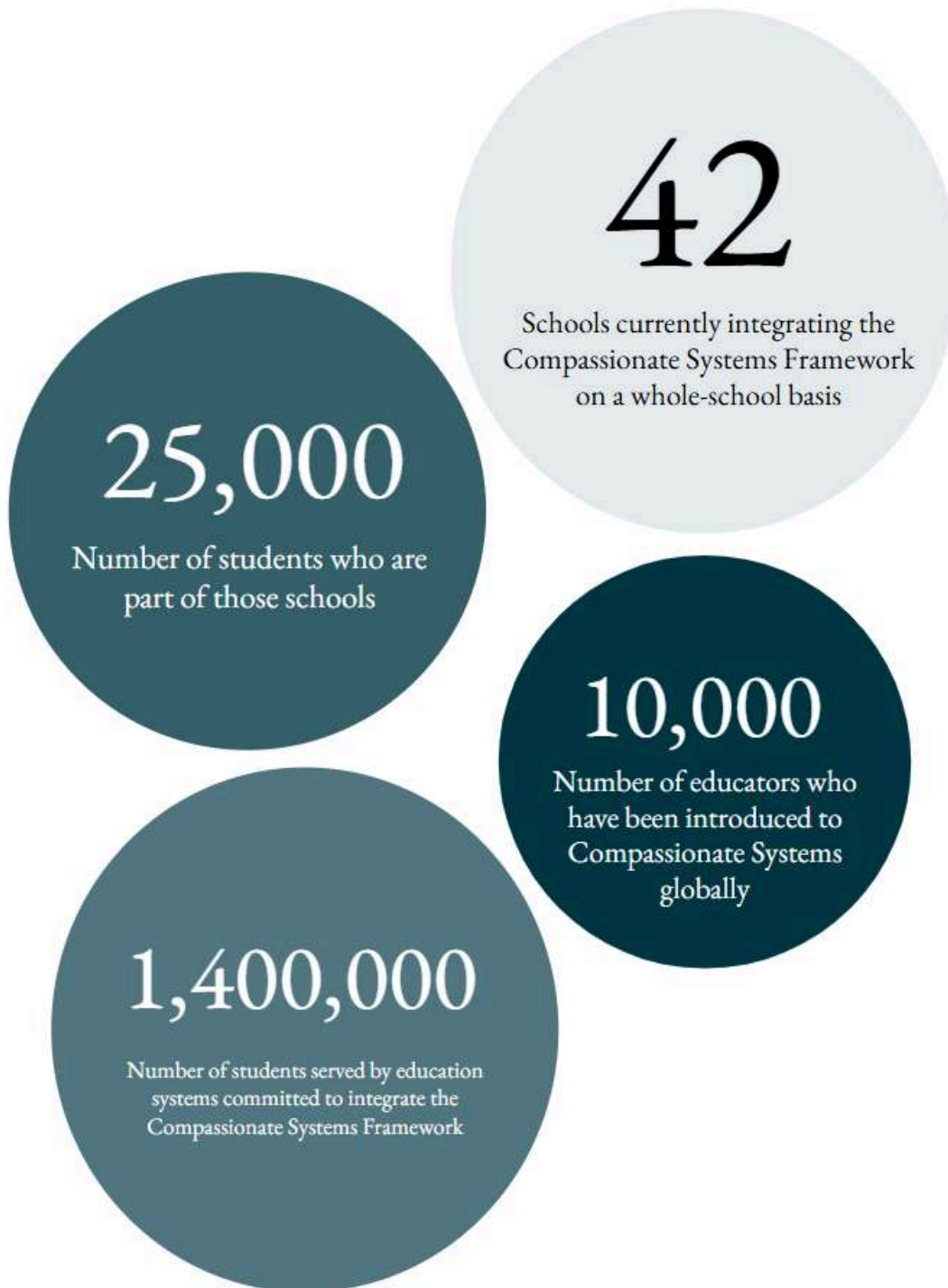
THE START OF THE JOURNEY: OUR PROGRAMS

Our 4-day introductory workshops offer the first point of contact with the Compassionate Systems Framework, an opportunity to learn the tools and practices and apply them to one's own personal and professional life and a sense of the type of community we are aspiring to grow. Most of the workshops' attendees over the years have been education professionals (teachers, youth workers, counselors, principals, directors of instruction or education, superintendents, etc.)



ADOPTING COMPASSIONATE SYSTEMS AS A FRAMEWORK FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE IN EDUCATION

We have been collaborating with actors from all levels of education systems (schools, school districts, county offices of education, departments and ministries of education) across the world to support ongoing efforts of systems change.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AND THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

California

Partnership with the Department of Education,
especially the Expanded Learning Division



1500+

Education Professionals Attended
Our Introductory Workshops.

3,000,000

The number of students
represented in the 12 counties with
which we have worked the most.
This is half of the state's student
population.

800+

Education Professionals
Who've Attended Our
Introductory Workshops

175,000

The number of students represented in
the 12 school districts with which we
have worked the most. This is 30% of
the province's student population.

British Columbia

Partnership with the Ministry of Education and Child Care

Compassionate Systems Leadership is a foundational
part of the prevention strategy in the provincial
[Mental Health in Schools Strategy](#)

OUR COLLABORATIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS



[*Access Full Map*](#)

~ A Few Highlights ~

Collaboration with the Lutheran Schools of South Australia, Northern Territory, & Western Australia

40 schools and 15,000 students

[A research paper](#) was recently published on this effort

Collaboration with the borough of Staten Island, New York

Over 30 schools involved and multiple community organizations

[Article](#) on the involvement of the Canvas Institute

Collaboration With 3 Schools in Japan

Tokyo International school, Yokohama International School and Hakuba International School

[Examples](#) of application from students, staff and parents

Hong Kong

Community of practice with 8 schools, over 900 educators introduced to Compassionate Systems

[Video](#) highlighting how educators describe the impact of the framework for them

OUR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AS LEADERS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Every time we collaborate with a school, we emphasize the importance of involving students as equal partners and leaders in the systems change processes. Our dedicated Youth Leadership team supports schools with trainings for students and builds an international community of young people committed to mastering the Compassionate Systems tools and practices.



[More on Our Programs Promoting Climate Awareness](#)



[More on our Youth Council](#)



OUR WIDER COMMUNITY & RESEARCH EFFORTS

We have devoted important efforts to involve researchers and experts from wide horizons in the Compassionate Systems work from the onset. Here are a few of the people who have worked with us as reviewers of the Master Practitioner Certification Program:



Kimberly Schonert-Reichl
*Novo Foundation Endowed Chair
in Social and Emotional Learning
University of Illinois Chicago*



Mark Greenberg
*Bennett Endowed Chair in
Prevention Research Penn
State College of Health
and Human Development*



Paul Reville
*Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of
Educational Policy and Administration
Harvard Graduate School of Education*



Helle Jensen
*Renowned psychologist
Director of Empathic
Macht Schule*



Michael Fullan
*Emeritus Professor of Policy Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*



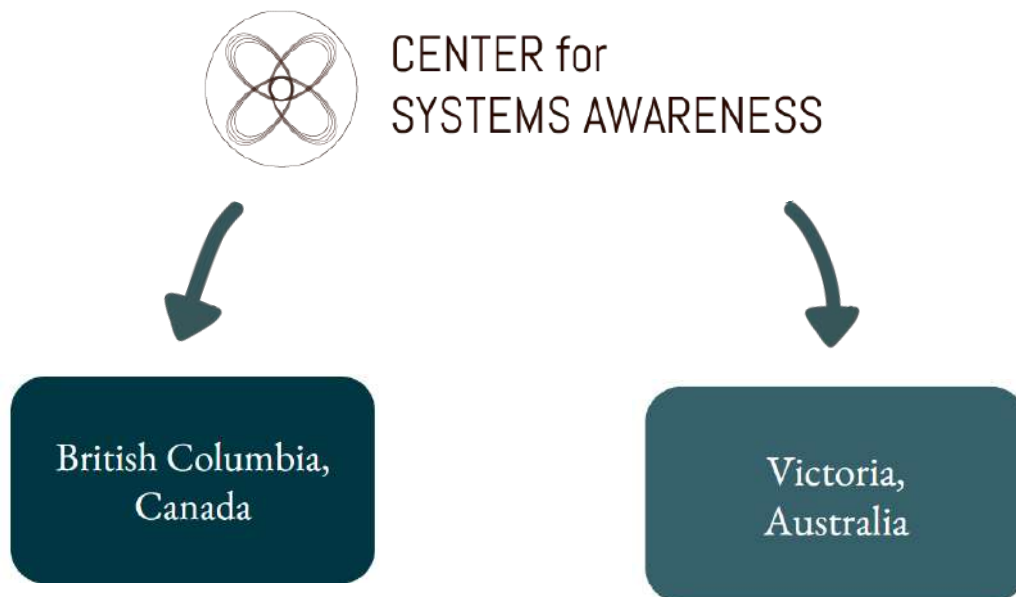
Robert Kegan
*Meehan Professor of Adult
Learning and Professional
Development Harvard
Graduate School of Education*

The [MIT Systems Awareness Lab](#), an independent lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was created in 2022 to carry out research at the intersection of the practice of compassionate systems change, the latest insights in neuroscience and innovative methodologies to measure the quality and properties of social fields and awareness shifts. Yearly conferences have gathered a diverse community of researchers and practitioners towards the goal of exploring the science of systems change.

LOOKING FORWARD: OUR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE WORK

Local Hubs

Two organizations dedicated to growing the Compassionate Systems locally are incubating, and we hope that many more will be added in the near future. These local hubs will be able to support practitioner communities and school implementation much more meaningfully.



Good Ancestor Cities

We want to make sure that the wellbeing of children and the next generations is at the heart of societal priorities, and working in education is necessary but not enough. We are working on a whole-community model of intervention with initial sites in Denmark, and others in conversation.

FULL REPORT





Introduction

If our current global situation—with mounting impacts of climate change, international conflict, and inequity—has taught us anything, it is that we live in deeply interdependent, interconnected and complex systems. Yet little in our education—from school to university to professional development—prepares us to understand and work with this complexity. The result is institutions of education, government, business, and the social sector are locked in a perpetual reactive mode, often implementing ‘fixes’ that ultimately make problems worse—and societies increasingly caught in vicious cycles of frustration, polarization, anger, hopelessness, and disconnect at all levels.


Our mission is to help people find another way to respond so that the systems we shape and live in can contribute to a thriving future for life on a healthy planet.

The Compassionate Systems Framework, is an ongoing synthesis of tools and practices that form a coherent framework to cultivate the capacities people need to contribute to this thriving future for all, including:

- Self-awareness and emotional literacy
- Systems awareness - systems thinking and systems sensing
- Reflective dialogue and relational competencies
- Fostering personal vision and cultivating shared visions
- Contemplative disposition

These tools and practices come from long-standing intellectual, scientific and philosophical traditions. In some cases we directly borrowed and adapted models from other organizations and thinkers¹, and in others we have developed new tools in partnership with our practitioner communities by translating scientific insights into workable models. The opportunity to test and refine over decades has resulted in tools that are both intuitive and developmental - simple to understand, yet that take a lifetime to master and integrate. As individuals and teams embark on this journey of transformation, they also begin to show up differently towards others, creating new ways of working together productively. This focus on relationships is a neglected aspect of most approaches to “systems change,” which often focus on changes within the existing system and dooms many otherwise worthwhile efforts to never getting beyond superficial results.

¹ See, for example, the MIT systems thinking and organizational learning tradition of Peter Senge and others for archetypes such as the *systems awareness iceberg*, *shifting the burden*, and *dance of change* tools. See also the work of David Kantor’s *Four Player Model*, Robert Plutchik’s *Wheel of Emotions*, Richard Davidson’s *4 Pillars of Wellbeing*, and the Presencing Institute’s *Case Clinics*.



We believe that education in the broad sense is a uniquely important lever of change in society. However, rather than focus on fixing the industrial-age school model, we have focused on developing new thinking and relating skills among adults, children and young people, so they become more able to evolve education to meet their own needs and context and partnering with accomplished educational innovators already doing this. For us, the work starts with putting children, young people and their wellbeing at the heart of building healthy communities. It then unfolds with helping adults at all levels of authority in the system develop their capacities as compassionate systems practitioners dedicated to integrating these tools into their work and lives. But, we also know that shifting the norms and power structures in education will take decades if not years and have been pursuing a strategy of focusing on ‘target localities’ where we can work with local partners in the ongoing personal and institutional change.

The work around the Compassionate Systems Framework began ten years ago with a prototyping process in partnership with the International Baccalaureate program focused on 10 schools in 8 countries. These schools were interested to experiment how the Compassionate Systems tools and practices, when infused in pedagogy, curriculum and teacher development, could help them achieve both meaningful learning outcomes for their students but also higher wellbeing and better school climate for everyone in their school community.

Within a few years, we began working state/province-wide in California and British Columbia. In California, we were invited by the State Director for Expanded Learning, which is accompanying youth services providers across the state, to work closely with a constellation of leaders from multiple county offices and from key agencies within the Department of Education. The original aim of this effort was to transform positively the work culture in the Expanded Learning division at the Department and in county offices, in order to create more collaboration across organizational silos, better relationships between districts and the department staff assisting them, and more generally foster conditions where all adults would collaborate to bring more well being and equity for young people and educators across California. In British Columbia, we started to work with the Ministry of Education and Child Care to support their efforts to create strong foundations for the wellbeing of all learners and educators in the province.

In one part of our work, we were focused on micro-implementation at the school level. In the other part, we were focused on macro-implementation at a state level. The nature of these two commitments has guided our work in the last ten years into an integrated approach to change in education, from kindergarten lessons on the cycle of water to statewide decision-making on the accountability of school districts. This interest in working both directly with students and also with high-level leaders is an important aspect of how we think about the change we seek to grow in the world.

How We Think About Systems Change in Education

It is common to advocate the importance of systems change, but then introduce top-down mechanistic approaches that produce little more than compliance, rather than wide-spread innovation. We believe that deep change cannot be forced by anyone or anything, but rather emerges as a product of carefully cultivating the conditions for it.

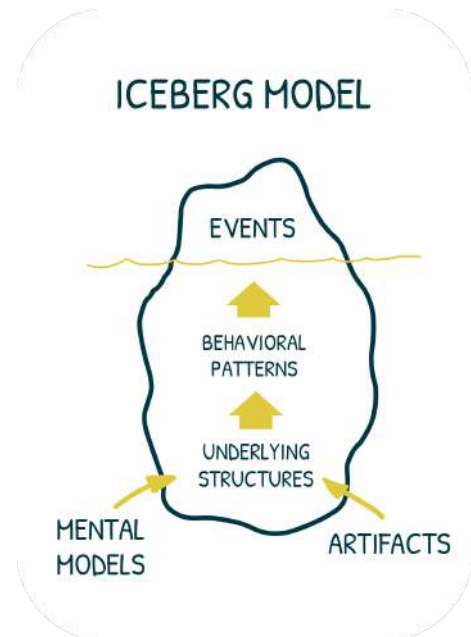


Our work has been guided by a simple model, the *Mandala for Systems Change*, that posits that systems change emerges at the nexus of four forces: capacity-building, community-building, research and practice. Those four forces are in a dynamic relationship and the space that is created by their interaction is where change grows. They need to be balanced, as too much focus on one of the forces would create an imbalance in the system and hamper growth. For example, if a school sends all a group of teachers to a professional development session, but does not pay attention to how the new knowledge will be shared in the community afterwards, there won't likely be any meaningful change as a result of attending the program. This model helps us to work with our partners on planning for change in an effective way.

Another model that helps us and our partners engage with the systems they are a part of is the iceberg. It suggests that in order to change the immediate reality you see, it is not enough to want to change the behavior of people: you need to reshape the structures, mental and material, that bring forth the behaviors. Many metaphors from the natural world can illustrate this concept. For example, if you want healthy tomato plants to grow tall, but you put all your attention on providing tutors to the branches and neglect your soil, your efforts in physically trying to change the behavior of the plants will amount to nothing: the poor soil will keep generating the same weak plants. To grow healthy plants, you need to have the right conditions in your soil. The same is true for organizational change and in education. If you are trying to improve your students' capacity to concentrate in class, you cannot only focus on strategies they can use to ignore distractions. Rather, you should also make sure the classroom is at an appropriate temperature, explore the students' own mental models about their ability to focus, make sure they get the right level of physical activity and think about different ways you can engage them and foster their

concentration. The iceberg model helps us think about change as a dynamic and complex process that involves reshaping many layers of reality, not only the behavior you want to see.

These two models shape how we think about change within a partner organization, and they also shape how we think about those partnerships. Complexity demands an adaptive approach, if we want the changes to last. Hence, what we have designed is not a program with prescriptive elements, but rather a framework based on tried and tested tools, practices and guiding ideas that leaders in those educational communities decide to adopt to create changes that they want to see in their communities. There is not one right way to implement the Compassionate Systems Framework, but rather a multitude of ways to infuse its tools and practices into the practices of your organization or community to bring about the reality you want to see. This means implementation is highly contextual.



The way we think about change also affects the way we build relationships with partners. We adopt a long-term perspective where there is no specific period of intervention. Rather, we walk alongside our partners as long as they want to, evolving our accompaniment as their capacities grow. We help organizational leaders put the structures in place to make sure that the changes observed are not superficial and vulnerable to be reversed quickly, but rather endure through time.

We also believe that the only way we people can change the systems they are a part of is by changing themselves first. As more and more people from the same organizational context start to shift the way they show up and relate to one another, a space for crafting different aspirations for the organization emerges. People then have the language and relational capacity to create a shared understanding of their reality and decide on a different course of action that would bring more alignment with their aspiration and wellbeing to the people involved. As a result, policies, standards, events, programs start to change, and people's beliefs evolve, which in turn influence how people experience the organization. As more and more people develop fluency in the practices and tools of systems change and systems awareness, the organization slowly evolves in ways that do not depend on the will of one hierarchical leader, but rather emerge out of a different way for people to relate to each other across the organization. With enough time, a sustained commitment to the shared aspirations and the right structures in place, these fundamental changes last, even when people in leadership positions leave. At some point, people might not

even know that they are practicing with Compassionate Systems tools, but they know that the space they are in feels radically different than it did before.

This type of change process is what we are supporting practitioners to nurture in their own context, whether in a school, in a district or at the scale of a state or province. Although it looks very differently across settings, the principles, tools and practices are the same. With our partners at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab, we published in 2019 an [introduction document](#) to Compassionate Systems that outlines the foundations of the framework and describes some of our first collaborations and impacts in education, focusing on schools. Six years later, our commitment to growing places of learning where children and adults thrive has remained the same, but our reach and partnerships have significantly widened. You will find in the next section a summary of the influence that the Compassionate Systems Framework has had across the world and where transformation efforts are currently the most active.





The Impact of Compassionate Systems

Our Programs: The Starting Point Of The Journey

For many people, the journey into Compassionate Systems starts with attending one of our Foundations workshops. Those workshops last 4 days and provide participants with an introduction to the framework and a chance to apply the tools and practices to real challenges they bring from their workplace and personal life. Over the last 10 years, we have run over 50 of those programs, reaching over 4,000 people from 56 countries. The vast majority of people who attended those workshops over the years are educators: teachers, counselors, principals, superintendents, directors of services in a district or county office, university professors, staff from ministries of educations, etc.

The Foundations workshop is the first point of entry, but it does not end there. In 2020, we started to offer Global Community Calls, where experienced practitioners would share stories of how they apply the tools and practices in their context and create spaces of dialogue for other practitioners to reflect on their own practice. In 5 years, we have hosted over 50 of those calls and they have been attended by over 1,000 individuals.

For those who show a deep interest in pursuing their journey of self-development and contributing to education systems change, we offer an intensive year-long Master Practitioner Certification Program. 200 people from 16 countries have gone through the certification in the last 6 years since its inception. Many of those people are the champions of deep transformation in schools, district and county offices and non-profits and become resources for their local community and for the global community of practitioners.

Whether they continue on from the Foundations workshop to participate in other offerings or not, we have found that many people report that discovering the Compassionate Systems Framework has had a major impact on their personal life. Whether it's through adopting a personal meditation practice, through an increased awareness of how their emotional system operates and how they can relate with other people with compassion, or through understanding better the dynamics and patterns they found themselves in their family, when we ask people what Compassionate Systems has changed for them, they tend to speak first about their personal life.

Many people however do choose the path of integrating Compassionate Systems tools and practices in their organization after attending an introductory workshop. This organic growth has been the main way the work has spread over the years.

Our Work Embedded In Large Educational Systems


As mentioned in the introduction, we have had the chance to work closely with leaders across the system of education of California for a decade now. Shortly after we started to work in California, we also had the opportunity to collaborate with the Ministry of Education of British Columbia, in Canada, to bring Compassionate Systems to school districts across the province. Those two large systems have certainly been a major focus for our energy so far.

California

Around 1500 education professionals from diverse geographies and diverse levels of the system in California have participated in a Compassionate Systems introductory program over the years. We have been able to observe significant changes in various parts of the system and we are committed to having a more direct impact on children and young people in the coming years. We published a report on our work in California in 2021 that you can access [here](#). Below are some details of our involvement and impact, including significant developments since that 2021 report. Our work in California has been supported generously by the Stuart Foundation since its inception.



We have worked extensively with statewide agencies and divisions within the California Department of Education (CDE). One major partner is the System of Support for Expanded Learning (SSEL), a statewide network comprising CDE staff, staff from county offices and technical assistance partners tasked with supporting the expanded learning programs (after-school and summer school enrichment programs) throughout the state. The introduction of Compassionate Systems tools and practices to the SSEL meetings, through the leadership of Expanded Learning Division Director Michael Funk, has been credited with playing a major role in shifting the culture of SSEL from “toxic and dysfunctional” to meetings feeling “like a celebration”. Members of SSEL started to see each other as whole human beings and care for one another. They have also been able to bring more trust, more openness and more listening to the space, in order to really focus on what the kids need, rather than on organizational politics. You can watch [this 10 minute video](#) that goes in more detail.



The transformation that happened within SSEL got many people throughout the state intrigued and wanting to bring the same positive transformation to their organization, and thus opened many doors to collaboration. The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) was one of those next major partners. CCEE is tasked with providing assistance to school districts in achieving certain statewide standards of quality, and especially accompanying districts that do not meet the standards. As a result of integrating Compassionate Systems tools and practices in how they operate internally, CCEE has become one of the most consistent teams in California, showing much decreased turnover. But more importantly, CCEE has completely transformed the way they provide assistance to districts, shifting from a compliance-based model to a relationship-driven model, from an accusatory “I got you!” to a compassionate “How can I help you?”. This has greatly improved relationships between the Department and districts and counties and allowed for improved collaboration working on the real challenges that impact the students.

Those two examples have demonstrated how shifting culture within statewide structures can potentially impact the entire student population. If adults work together in a more caring way, can deal with difficult situations more gracefully and focus on the wellbeing of children and creating equity in the system, then all students will benefit from it.

In addition to working at the statewide level, we have also been working closely with county and district leaders. Most of the 1500 professionals we referred to earlier are actually staff of county and district offices. Counties and districts have adopted Compassionate Systems on a voluntary basis, meaning it has taken solid roots in some places and less so in others, and it is living in different divisions in different places. The Expanded Learning divisions within the counties have generally been early adopters, and many Special Education divisions have also integrated the framework in their culture and operations. The 12 counties where Compassionate Systems has been integrated the most represent a population of 3 million students, half of the entire state.

In Sacramento County for example, one of the most active districts has been Folsom-Cordova. The Special Education team at the District Office has provided numerous professional development opportunities for employees across the district, reaching close to 450 staff members, including all people in positions of formal leadership. Their most intensive efforts have however been mostly targeted directly at improving the experience of the 3,000 students who benefit from an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The process of drafting an IEP can sometimes create situations of conflicts between staff and parents, so the team focused on supporting special education staff and parents to be able to engage in this exercise in a more productive way and avoid entering into “us versus them” dynamics. Two tools in particular, *check-ins* and the *ladder of connectedness*, were used in professional development with special education staff to prepare them to show up with more compassion in meetings with parents. They also worked intensively

with their community advisory committee, whose goal is to support parents of students with special needs across the district to participate fully in their child's education. The team shifted the approach of the committee meetings by introducing to the parents some tools and practices that helped them give shape to their aspirations for their child's education. This helped parents feel empowered to look out for what they wanted for their child, and ensured that conversations between staff members and parents were centered on the wellbeing of the children rather than the conflicts opposing the adults. The Special Education team is now looking at how to engage the other divisions more deeply in the same type of transformational work.

In 2023, we also started a collaboration with two counties, Humboldt and Ventura, called the Compassionate Systems Site Development Program, and we added a third county, Tulare, in 2024. Through this initiative we directly support a number of schools and expanded learning programs, as well as the county offices of education, in cultivating change within their organizations and we create communities of practice for leaders, educators and students to exchange on their realities and challenges.



The Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE), prior to engaging in direct work in schools, was focused on changing its internal work culture and practices. Through the leadership of the Director of Expanded Learning Services and supported by the Associate Superintendent for Educational Services, around 75 education professionals in the county office participated in at least one introductory Compassionate Systems workshop, and many attended more than one. They have also started a community of practice that meets every 3 months for staff members to keep learning new ways to apply Compassionate Systems tools and practices in their work. The vision is to equip leaders across the county office to contribute to positive change in the schools they work with. 13 different schools and programs in the county are now participating or have participated last year in the site development process.

Working closely with leaders at the state, district, county, school and community levels in California has taught us a lot about what is needed for education systems to transform. California will continue to be an important area of focus for our work, while we also look for opportunities to collaborate with more states, provinces and countries on whole-system efforts.

British Columbia

We started to work closely with senior staff at the Ministry of Education of the Canadian province of British Columbia in 2019. British Columbia has one of the most sophisticated systems for monitoring the wellbeing of its children and has long had a commitment to improving the wellbeing of children and adults. Compassionate Systems provided the Ministry a framework to support the school districts to make possible the transformations they wanted to undertake in order to really put the wellbeing of the children at the heart all they do . Since 2019, over 800 education professionals from across the province have attended one of our introductory programs, a few of which were held in British Columbia. In 2021, the Ministry went a step further and included Compassionate Systems as a foundation of their provincial [Mental Health in Schools Strategy](#). The 12 school districts where we are most involved represent 175,000 students, which is thirty percent of the student population in British Columbia.



Some school districts have been early adopters of the Compassionate Systems, and Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows was the very first one in 2019. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent introduced most of their principals to the Framework, and say it helped them “remember to see each other as people first and to really take the time to listen to each other”. [A case story](#) was published in 2021 about the first efforts.

Although most of the education professionals who attended introductory workshops have been district leaders, many principals and teachers have also been involved with Compassionate Systems for a number of years.

We are building a strong partnership with the Nisga'a Nation and School District. We began working together a few years ago. From the start, teachers, support staff, and Elders & Knowledge Keepers are involved in growing together in awareness and skill that connects the overall community and holds the aspirations they have for their community and their young people. The last [Enhancing Student Learning Report](#) states that the Compassionate Systems framework is helping the District in "creating a holistic educational environment that respects and incorporates Indigenous knowledge and practices".

In the Sunshine Coast School District, trustees, senior management, teachers, support staff, principals, vice-principals, students, and parents have all come together through numerous workshops, using compassionate systems tools to engage in meaningful dialogue and deepen their connections. Whether through reflective conversations between teachers and students about their experiences at school, through staff committee meetings facilitated by the iceberg model to encourage open dialogue, or through the creative tension model applied at stakeholder meetings to approach a vision for professional learning—these practices are making a tangible difference.

The compassionate systems tools they are using provide a framework that allows them to enter and explore difficult conversations in ways that foster understanding and create pathways to find solutions. This shared approach is helping their schools grow as thriving communities, where challenges are met with collaboration and a commitment to positive change.

The current superintendent shares her perspective:

“[We are seeing significant growth in] our ability to engage in difficult conversations with empathy and openness, even when perspectives differ. Despite our differences, we leave these conversations feeling more connected and understanding each other in new ways. Our schools are increasingly becoming thriving, resilient communities—places where collaboration, compassion, and shared purpose guide us forward.”



The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at the University of British Columbia has been an important partner since the beginning and has been hosting the Compassionate Systems Leadership Network and holding regular community calls with practitioners across the province. HELP has also facilitated a yearlong training program called Going Deeper, a local alternative to the Master Practitioner Certification Program. The network’s [website](#) has a lot of informative resources.

The Compassionate Systems Framework keeps making its way as an important resource for all educators in the province who seek to improve the wellbeing of young people. The Center for Systems Awareness will continue to be an important partner in this effort.

Our Work in Schools & Communities Across The World

Since our initial collaboration with the group of international schools aligned the IB curriculum, we have had the opportunity to work with many school leaders across the globe and the community of educators who are integrating the Compassionate Systems Framework in their institution has grown immensely. We estimate that over the last 10 years, 10,000 educators have been introduced to the framework, and that 1,400,000 students are served in education systems that are committed to integrate the Compassionate Systems Framework..


There are currently 42 schools in 10 countries that demonstrate a commitment to a whole school approach to integrating Compassionate Systems in how they operate. Those schools represent a student population of over 25,000 students.

SINGAPORE

At Dulwich College in Singapore, the team has integrated Compassionate Systems tools and practices in many aspects of the school : curriculum, pedagogy, planning, student and staff wellbeing, and many more. For example, they redesigned the entire Global Citizenship curriculum for the Junior and Senior schools based on the Compassionate Systems framework. They also created a staff wellbeing committee and were able to create a much more open and honest space during the recent process to draft the new school improvement plan for the Junior school. Trends from their Attitudes to School and Self internal survey that they conduct 2 to 3 times a year seems to suggest that students feel increasingly more happy and safe at school, and that they consider their fellow students to be kind. The team is looking into more ways to capture the shifts that they are starting to see in the school.

JAPAN

In Japan, two principals who are Master Practitioners have worked in three schools that are forming a regional community of practice: Tokyo International School, Yokohama International School and Hakuba International School. In the words of one of the principals, *“we are changing the way that adults are showing up at work, which changes the way children are experiencing school”*. Tokyo International School, for example, has completely revised its teacher evaluation process, integrating a more compassionate perspective on how to relate with the teachers’ growth. They also convened parents, students and staff to a large forum about how children use technologies, and used the Compassionate Systems tools to understand the systemic nature of the issue at hand, foster dialogue and deep listening and help participants



to understand others' realities with compassion. The forum produced a strategy that the school is now using to support both the integration of technology in learning experiences and the care for the digital and overall well being of students and families. You can see some examples of how Tokyo International School and Yokohama International School have used the tools in those initiatives [here](#).

In certain places, we are also working with regional school administrations and clusters of schools that integrate Compassionate Systems and are able to form communities of practice and share experiences to catalyze change in a wider community.

DENMARK

In Denmark, we have worked for many years with the municipality of Rødovre and the 9 schools on its territory. Compassionate Systems tools and practices became an important part of the regular meetings that gather the leaders from the 9 schools together. The former superintendent says *“the check-ins became a weekly practice, and as a result people wanted more reflective conversations. It shifted how they lead, and they had insights they could then use with their teachers and in staff meetings. Principles learned how to lead and teach from a place of vulnerability”*. We estimate that 500 to 600 educators in the municipality have been introduced to Compassionate Systems over the years.

STATEN ISLAND

The borough of Staten Island in New York City is one of the places in which we have had the longest partnerships. Supported by the [Staten Island Foundation](#), we have collaborated with the Department of Education, which introduced Compassionate Systems to over 30 schools across the borough through multiple workshops and professional development initiatives. We have also been working with multiple community-based organizations, among which is the Canvas Institute. You can find an account of how they adopted compassion cultivation and systems thinking practices in their youth violence prevention programs [here](#).

AUSTRALIA

In Australia, the Woodleigh Institute has been using the Compassionate Systems framework in the work it was already doing around systems change in education and have been promoting the framework across the country. The Institute's partnership with Lutheran Education South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia (LESNW) is among the most inspiring cases. LESNW is a community of 40 schools and 15,000 students, and Compassionate Systems tools and practices

helped fuel the ongoing work of the Woodleigh Institute with the network. After a few years of building capacity and community with school leaders, teachers and administrators at the regional office, leaders of LESNW [reported in 2022](#) that Compassionate Systems had helped them create a new vision and goals, but most importantly that it was helping them actually live out the vision. In the words of their Educational Leadership Director, quoting what some of the school leaders were sharing in interviews, “Compassionate Systems is helping us to truly be what we say we are.” LESNW has published a [research paper](#) on this work which gives an in-depth look at the transformations that have been taking place.

HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, the Catalyst Education Lab (CEL) has been an important partner in promoting the Compassionate Systems Framework and together we have reached about 1100 people from many different schools, non-profits, foundations and other organizations. The CEL has launched the first cohort of a one-year community of practice for Compassionate Systems in the Fall of 2024 with 44 participants from 8 different schools. The Deputy Head at one of the participating schools describe the influence the framework has had in her school so far in those terms:

“Because we have a team of teachers who learnt the Compassionate Systems tools together, this allowed our management team to develop a common language when exploring various perspectives of the school. Our colleagues gradually develop a better collective understanding of the events, the mental models involved, and realise that we can actually change some of the underlying structures. These tools were eventually spread into their department meetings too when analysing various issues or even the mindset of taking good care of our colleagues so that they know ‘I am aware and present for you.’ This allows us to better work together to develop the school.”

You can find more examples of Hong Kong educators sharing their experience with Compassionate Systems through [this 10-minutes video](#).

Having the privilege to work directly with educators in and out of schools to see the direct positive influence that the Compassionate Systems Framework can have on young people’s development is the core of our mission. We are grateful for the trust that numerous educators have put in us over the years and thrilled to see that the Compassionate Systems Framework truly helps them grow meaningful changes in the nature of the experience of education for both their students and the adults who are taking care of them.

Our Work Directly With Young People as Leaders

We believe young people need to be equal partners in the transformation of the education spaces. Since the beginning, we have made it a priority to introduce young people to the Compassionate Systems tools and practices everywhere adults are also introduced. This allows for adults and young people to work together in the reimagining and redesigning of their education system.

In the last 10 years, over 1,700 students have participated in capacity-building workshops and concrete projects to effect meaningful change in their school and community. Here are a few examples of collaborations we have carried out.

The British School of Jakarta is one of the schools we have been collaborating with for the longest time, and we worked directly with student groups from the beginning. For example, the Compassionate Systems Student Ambassador Group at the school was instrumental in advocating for and actually designing the school's new wellbeing program, which was implemented across the school. You can find more details on the program [here](#).

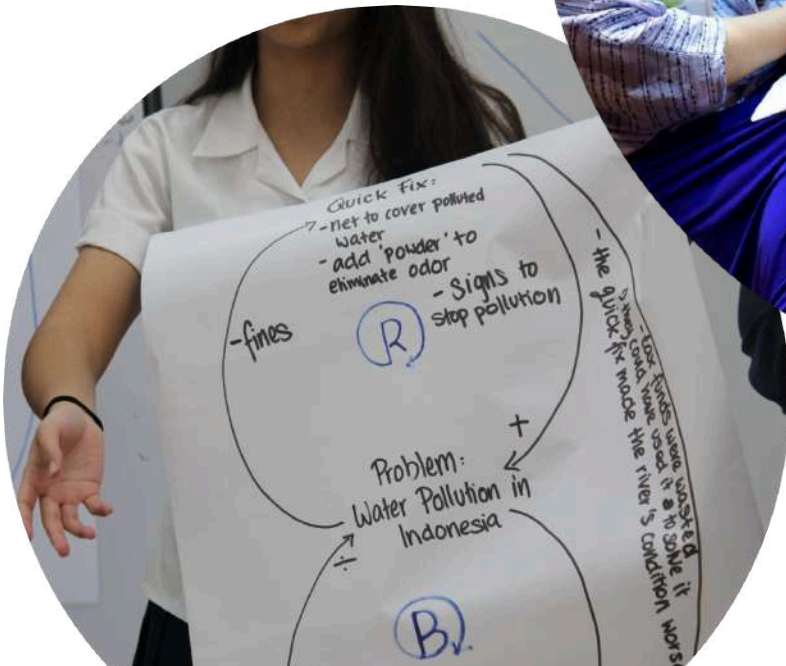


At Valor Academies, in Nashville, Tennessee, the team has integrated Compassionate Systems tools and practices in their existing leadership development program for students. The elaborate [feedback form](#) that was filled out by the students who participated will give you an idea of how students perceive experience learning about Compassionate Systems tools and practices.

We have also been facilitating learning communities composed of students and teachers around climate change and the use of the climate simulator EN-Roads. [This case story](#) provides details about the few different communities we have hosted on this theme, what students have learned from them and some of the outcomes that emerged from them, including how students from multiple schools have gone on to teach other students about climate change using EN-Roads and the Compassionate Systems tools and practices.

Seeing how meaningful it was for students to interact with peers from other countries in those projects, in 2021 we created the Youth Council, a community for young people who wanted to dive deeper into the Compassionate Systems tools and practices. Students apply to be part of this community for a semester, and through their bi-weekly calls they integrate what they learn into a project of their choosing. This [case story](#) written in 2022 narrates the experience of the first year of the Youth Council in more detail. Since then, 50 young people from all corners of the world have been part of one iteration or another of the Youth Council.

We take our work with students very seriously and our experience shows us that their involvement is an essential condition for any change to happen in a school. We hope that our approach to working with young people can contribute to schools becoming spaces of thriving for them.



Our Collaborations

The complexity of the challenges the world is facing demands radical collaboration across fields and geographies. Since the creation of the Compassionate Systems Framework itself was an exercise in synthesizing different perspectives, fields and traditions, it was only natural for us to work with others who share the same aspirations as we do. This way of inviting experts from other organizations and pioneers of other frameworks into conversation has been something we have prioritized since our very inception.

We were thus at the forefront of a collaboration to investigate the emerging concept of generative social fields. [A report](#) was published on the topic in 2016 and a large convening was held at the Garrison Institute in the Fall of 2018. Since then, the concept of social field has garnered attention in the awareness-based systems change and academic fields, notably through the scholarly work of [Lukas Herrmann](#), one of our collaborators.



The International Baccalaureate (IB) has been a close partner since the beginning of the work, as mentioned in the introduction. The IB developed in 2020 its own [guiding document](#) on utilizing the Compassionate Systems Framework in the context of an international school. We are still collaborating with people there, and their new [Systems Transformation Pathway](#) is in part an adaptation of some of the principles that were guiding the implementation of Compassionate Systems in IB schools.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has created in 2022 a lab dedicated to advancing the study of generative social fields, and more generally the science of systems change: the [MIT Systems Awareness Lab](#). It is playing an important role in convening experts from education, neurosciences, psychology, management and beyond to inquire about how we can cultivate the conditions for lasting, enduring systems change. Our CEO, Mette Böll, is also the Research Director of the Lab. The Lab has recently published a white paper on their research methodology, which you can access [here](#).



We have also been convening experts in dialogues with the practitioners of the Compassionate Systems Framework. Every year, we invite [experts](#) from all corners of the field of education to review the learning portfolios of the Master Practitioners who are going through our certification process. We then invite all of them to attend the last week of the program in July where

practitioners present their portfolio to their cohort. This creates a valuable platform for dialogue between academics and practitioners that nourishes our understanding of systems change, as well as nourishes the wider community.

While we have always put a high value on inviting others in conversation in the spaces we facilitate, we have also had the privilege to collaborate with other organizations and contribute to their mission. For example, we have worked with the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) to provide [masterclasses](#) to participants of the IDG summits. Our co-founders, Mette Böll and Peter Senge, have also been invited on a number of podcasts and conferences, of which you can find a list [here](#).

Finally, while most people who attended our capacity-building workshops have been education professionals, a number of people from other non-profits, NGOs and businesses have also participated and brought Compassionate Systems tools and practices to their organization. Here are a few of them:

- [National Center for Youth Law](#)
- Atentamente
- Save the Children
- Siemens Healthcare
- Mass General Hospital

As the Compassionate Systems community is growing, we strive to continue the necessary exercise of convening stakeholders in conversation around the most meaningful questions in education and society. This intention guides much of our vision for the next steps of our work at the Center for Systems Awareness.





The Future of The Compassionate Systems Work

In the next few years, there are two important efforts that will help us support communities in their efforts to cultivate thriving places for all.

First, after 10 years of working mainly in the education system, we have been able to observe the complexity of the web of actors and factors that affect young people's wellbeing way beyond the school. We believe that if we want to be serious in our vision to truly change the way young people experience learning and growing, we need to make sure the whole of society is prioritizing their wellbeing. We are thus starting to experiment with a new model of cross-sector mobilization that would result in communities coming together to ensure a thriving future for young people and those who will come after them. We call this model "Good Ancestor Cities". We are in discussion with two prototype sites in Denmark, Canada and Australia and we are hoping that Compassionate Systems tools and practices can be a framework for many more communities who share the same vision to make it reality.

Second, as the work of Compassionate Systems expands and deepens across the world, the need for localized oversight and direct engagement becomes apparent. The worldwide community of practitioners has reached a level of maturity that allows for them to fill in this role. We are thus looking at our own growth with a perspective based on the metaphor of the mycelium which empowers local actors to create and operate their own non-profits who will be responsible for shepherding the work of Compassionate Systems in their communities. The first two organizations are in incubation in British Columbia, Canada and [Victoria, Australia](#). We are envisioning that more will emerge in the coming years and that the role of the Center for Systems Awareness will slowly transition to being a support structure for the local efforts and a coordinating body for all local organizations. This means we will be active in the next few years to support the development of those local non-profit.

We are always trying to figure out how the work we are doing can best serve the communities we are involved with. Our commitment with our partners does not revolve around implementing and evaluating a program: it is a long-term partnership to walk alongside them as they realize their own vision of a thriving world for the young people they care for. We will continue to honor our relationships and to put our resources at the service of more people committed to the wellbeing of all humans and the planet.

Conclusion

We have been very active in the last ten years and the community around and influence of the Compassionate Systems Framework has grown tremendously. The massive worldwide adoption of virtual meetings has greatly fueled the growth of our activities. While the increased number of offerings and participants confirms this growth, we also know from so many stories, some of which you were able to read in this report, that the Compassionate Systems tools and practices have been transforming the lives of more and more people.

The Center for Systems Awareness has been the leader of this budding movement, achieving tremendous success with a relatively small team and limited resources. As we look forward and dream even more boldly of the world we want our young ones to inherit, we know we will need financial means that meet the extent of our aspirations. We hope to have demonstrated throughout this report that we are already contributing to meaningful change in the lives of tens of thousands of people, and that the growth of the work behind the Compassionate Systems Framework is a pursuit worth supporting.



Center for Systems Awareness

~ 2025 ~

