

**SAN ANTONIO, TX**  
**Mayor Ron Nirenberg**

## **SAN ANTONIO COMPASSIONATE INSTITUTE 2020**

On June 22, 2017, Mayor Ron Nirenberg approved a city council resolution that states: “The city encourages San Antonio’s institutions of learning to have all ages explore and teach compassion, based on the understanding that extensive research and resources validate the full spectrum of the benefits of compassion, from being good for the bottom line of business to being a part of the human DNA.” As a result of this resolution, San Antonio’s first Compassionate Institute was created, making San Antonio the first among some 450 compassionate cities worldwide to integrate systemic compassion into schools and college/university campuses. The Institute receives coordination and administrative support from the City of San Antonio’s Faith-Based Initiative within the Department of Human Services. The design and launch of the Institute was a collaborative effort involving a 10-person planning team of compassion advocates and trained facilitators.

The first Compassionate Institute Fellows participated in an intensive five-week, 10-session virtual compassion training program from the Center for Compassion, Integrity, and Secular Ethics (CCISE) at Life University in Atlanta. Compassionate Integrity Training (CIT) is a resiliency-informed, neuroscience-based curriculum that helps participants cultivate human values as skills; among these: calming body and mind, ethical mindfulness, emotional awareness, self-compassion, impartiality and common humanity, forgiveness and gratitude, empathic concern, compassion, appreciating interdependence, and engaging systems with discernment. Participants met twice each week to learn and share their understandings of CIT as well as how they envision integrating these skills into their classrooms and educational institutions.

During class time, participants reflected on their learning and made connections to their own personal and professional experiences. Small group activities supported reflective practice and provided a space for dialogue among the participants. As part of the program, participants were asked to pair with accountability partners to share their journey and to provide a support system for each other. The pairings were different each week, to give participants opportunities to meet many of their cohort members.

Following the summer’s education component, all participants were invited and expected to continue the implementation component of the Compassionate Institute by meeting during the academic year. These smaller cohorts were made up of approximately 12 educators from the same institution or linked across similar institutions. There were 12 such smaller cohorts that met virtually every month for at least one hour from August 2020 through May 2021. Each cohort had a pair of co-facilitators and acted as a support system, skill refresher, and think tank for the integrative and strategic work within their educational systems and, many times, their personal lives, during the 2020 pandemic year. Evaluation data show most participants were able to increase the number of times they applied compassionate skills from mid-year to the end of the year. Compassionate Institute 2020 Fellows included 164 San Antonio educators from Pre-K through adult educational learning environments. Eighty-five percent of San Antonio learning institutions, including 100 percent of San Antonio colleges and universities, were represented.

*Additional information is available from Ann Helmke, Faith Based Initiative/Compassionate San Antonio, Department of Human Services, at [ann.helmke@sanantonio.gov](mailto:ann.helmke@sanantonio.gov).*