



Some SoCal private schools indefinitely closed their doors amid the pandemic, others thrive

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As president of St. Pius X - St. Matthias Academy in Downey, where students are in class for summer and getting ready for the fall, Christian DeLarkin feels like his students and all Catholic schools are "an integral part of not only the Downey community but Southern California."

The pandemic changed all schools across the country. DeLarkin said PMA has been successful because it filled a need when public schools could not.

Paul Escala, who is the superintendent of schools at the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, echoed that sentiment.

"We were able to reopen ahead of public school peers and, as a result, we were able to bring our kids back in person in a safe manner," Escala said.

However, a number of private schools had to close this year. Some in underserved communities.

Blessed Sacrament School in Hollywood had to shut down at the end of the school year. Its [website cited](#) the COVID-19 pandemic and lower enrollment as the main factors.

Across California, enrollment in private schools decreased by about 18,000 students this year, a nearly 4% decrease compared to the year before, according to data from the [California Department of Education](#). But, this isn't new.

Different from public school, which saw its biggest drop in enrollment since the late 1990s during the 2020-21 school year, private schools have seen a similar decline in enrollment in other years.

The 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years saw a 3% and 3.5% decline from the years prior, respectively, and the 2008-09 school year saw a more than 5% drop in enrollment at private schools.

Experts say this is happening nationwide.

According to Neal McCluskey, the director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, lower-cost Catholic schools in urban areas were probably already "suffering from thin financial margins" before the pandemic.

"And COVID was kind of the final stroke against them," McCluskey added.

Additionally, the cost of private school is going up. According to the most recent figures from Private School Review, private school tuition increased, on average, about 27% in California since 2014. This is similar to the increase in cost across the country.

Even though California's private schools tend to cost more than the national average, the state's average is still less than many in the Northeast.

Locally, Catholic schools said they are trying to help families financially.

According to Paul Escala, many students receive "scholarships that are funded by donations, schools raise money, the archdiocese raises money on behalf of our most needy families."

At St. Pius X - St. Matthias Academy, the plan for the future is to show what a private education brings to students and the community.

"I think our community really appreciated all the sacrifice that the faculty and staff put in," said DeLarkin. "And that's why I think our enrollment is continuing to stabilize and increase."