

LEMONT PRIVATE SCHOOLS SEE BOOST IN INQUIRIES, TRANSFERS

Everest Academy, SS. Cyril & Methodius, St. Alphonsus/St. Patrick's and the Lemont Montessori School all report an increase in parent interest over the past year.

By [BJ Marshall](#) and [Amanda Luevano](#)

All four of the private elementary schools in Lemont report seeing an increase this year in parents interested in learning more about their programs, as well as greater attendance at open house events.

The schools, which include Everest Academy, Montessori School of Lemont, St. Alphonsus/St. Patrick School and SS. Cyril & Methodius School, have also seen an increase in mid-year transfer students during the 2010-2011 school year.

"It's been absolutely crazy," said Therese Colby, administrator of [Lemont Montessori](#), which has welcomed ten new students to its primary and elementary programs since January. "Our enrollment is up, our prospective parent coffees have been really busy, and we've had a lot of interest in our elementary program."

Renee Payne, principal at [St. Alphonsus/St. Patrick's](#), said her school has also seen an uptick in parent inquiries.

"We've definitely had more people who are interested this year," she said. "With the economy being what it is, I think people are looking for different options."

Payne said one reason parents have been attracted to the school is because of the "extras" offered both in the classroom and after school.

"We offer a wide variety of after-school activities, from athletics to art to chess club, to meet a variety of needs," she said.

In conjunction with Catholic Schools Week, the three Catholic schools in Lemont all held open house events on January 30.

"Our open house was an incredible success," said Shirley Tkachuk, principal at [SS. Cyril & Methodius](#).

For the first time, the school held its open house on a Sunday right after the 10:30 a.m. mass, and had many more attendees than in previous years.

Tkachuk noted that she has had interest from a broad range of families, including the church's own parishioners, those new to the area, and families whose children are currently in the public school system. She said she believes parents are attracted to the school because of its strong faith-based activities, commitment to serving others, strong integration of technology in the classroom and professional development of teachers.

[Everest Academy](#), which moved into its new facility on Bell Road in 2007, has seen a similar surge in interest this year.

“Families tell us that they really like our smaller classrooms and the personal attention that we give to our students,” said Natalia Blecka, marketing coordinator at Everest.

About 20 families with multiple children attended their open house, and Blecka said enrollment is definitely picking up this year. The school, which has about 95 students, enrolled 14 new students in January, including some who moved to the area and others transferring from Lemont and Homer Glen schools.

“With the economy, a lot of schools are seeing larger class sizes,” Blecka said. “When they come here, people are surprised to see that we have personal attention [for each student] — that’s hard to find these days.”

Everest, St. Al’s/St. Pat’s and SS. Cyril each offer some form of financial assistance and multiple-child discounts.

“We know that some families struggle, but we’ve found that many people are willing to sacrifice to send their children here,” Payne said.

Despite the reported increase in private school inquiries, officials in Lemont-Bromberek Combined School District 113A said enrollment has held steady this year. In August, 2,498 students were enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade. As of Feb. 14, enrollment was 2,498.

"As you can see from the data, our anticipated projected enrollment is congruent with our current data and we have not experienced any exodus of enrollment during this school year," District 113A Superintendent Tim Ricker said. "Know that this data could change as the economy takes an upturn or if housing development once again prospers here in Lemont."

Ricker indicated that there was no correlation between District 113A's enrollment patterns this year and the increase in private school interest, but commended area schools for their pursuit of academic excellence.

"We congratulate our colleagues in private education on their role in educating all of our children in the Lemont community," he said. "We work together in a number of ways with our colleagues to help to provide parents with a choice on how and what their children learn as they grow and prosper in Lemont."

Editor's Note: BJ Marshall has children who attend the Lemont Montessori School.