

## Centinela Valley superintendent, school board are looting

**district: Editorial**

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If State Controller John Chiang needed a poster boy for his effort to bring transparency to the salaries of school superintendents in California, he's got one: Superintendent Jose Fernandez of the Centinela Valley Union High School District.

Fernandez received more than \$663,000 in total compensation last year, Daily Breeze reporter Rob Kuznia discovered by digging into documents obtained from the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

Fernandez, superintendent of a district with four schools and about 6,600 students, received about \$273,000 more in total compensation than John Deasy, who runs the 650,000-student Los Angeles Unified School District. Fernandez earned just about \$73,000 less than the three superintendents of the nearby Torrance, Redondo Beach and Palos Verdes Peninsula districts — all put together.

Does it remind you of Bell, where obscene compensation prompted Chiang to assemble a statewide public database of salary and benefits for public officials? You bet it does.

There's a difference, apparently. Robert Rizzo, the city manager of Bell who had a salary near \$800,000 and total compensation of about \$1.5 million, is serving 10 to 12 years in prison, after he and six other Bell officials were convicted on corruption charges.

There's nothing illegal that we know of going on in Centinela Valley. The school board approved Fernandez's generous salary and obscene benefits.

Nothing illegal, but it's immoral for the leader of a small school district serving communities where the median household income ranges from \$33,000 to \$49,000, to siphon off \$663,000 in taxpayer money in a single year.

And Fernandez and the school board know full well that it's immoral, or they would not have constructed his contract in such a way that his salary for the 2013 calendar year was a "mere" \$271,000, but his perks were nearly \$400,000. Those perks are not as easy to pin down as salary and less likely to come to light — were it not for Kuznia's digging.

When the reporter sought comment from district officials, Fernandez responded through a

spokesman that he need not defend earning what he is legally entitled to by contract. We suspect he's going to have to change that tune.

Of the four school board members who voted for his contract in 2009, only board President Mariza Molina commented, saying, "He's a great leader" and "He is very transparent with the board." With the board, perhaps, but not with the community, the families whose children the schools are supposed to serve, or the taxpayers who pay the freight.

We have to wonder why the L.A. County Office of Education hadn't raised a red flag over his compensation. Just because it's not their job, perhaps? The personnel there just cut the checks and keep the payment files, apparently.

All the more reason for Controller Chiang to expand his database of public-employee compensation by adding schools. Chiang asked this month for districts to send him compensation documents. Good. Clearly, it needs to be done.

After all, even if Fernandez did save the school district from near-insolvency, as his supporters claim, that doesn't give him or the board the right to loot the district now.

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