

As scrutiny intensifies, Centinela Valley school board will hold public meeting Tuesday

By Rob Kuznia , *The Daily Breeze*

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Amid heightening scrutiny from school officials and lawmakers across California, the Centinela Valley school board tonight will hold its second meeting since the [furor over Superintendent Jose Fernandez's employment contract](#) erupted in early February.

Although the board overseeing three comprehensive high schools in Lawndale and Hawthorne will conduct routine business during the open-session portion of the [5:45 p.m. meeting](#), the five trustees will go into closed session to evaluate the performance of Fernandez, who amassed \$663,000 in compensation last year, and other high-ranking district staff members.

This is significant because the board has evaluated Fernandez just one time since approving his controversial employment contract in 2009. It is customary for school boards to evaluate their superintendents annually.

Last week, in response to a series of reports stemming from a Feb. 9 Daily Breeze article revealing not only Fernandez's \$663,000 compensation for calendar year 2103 but also the fact that he took a \$910,000 low-interest loan from the district to purchase a home, the executive director of the California Association of School Business Officials sent a mass email alerting its members to the situation.

Executive Director Molly McGee said the controversy underscores the importance of transparency — especially as the state gears up for a new era of increased local control in school finances.

“Since news of the superintendent's compensation package reached elected leaders in Sacramento, it has been a frequent topic of conversation at the State Capitol,” she said in the email. “Districts must take care to remember, particularly in this environment, that the decisions they make can affect the entire K-12 community. Public school contracts are public information, and must be made available to the public on request. Transparency is not an option; it's a reality.

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Also last week, state Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi, D-Torrance, [proposed a bill](#) seeking to prevent “excessive school superintendent compensation packages.”

According to the meeting agenda, during the closed-session portion of the meeting the board also will evaluate the job performance of the district's three assistant superintendents: Bob Cox (human resources), Ron Hacker (business services) and Allan Mucerino (educational services).

The last board meeting on Feb. 25 drew more than 100 people and was occasionally raucous, with many public speakers [venting their outrage](#) about Fernandez's contract.

Jack Foreman, president of the Centinela Valley teachers union, sent an email to his 320 members calling for a large turnout.

“The decision at the last board meeting to spend (up to) \$24,000 on a [public relations expert](#) to attempt to contain the superintendent’s scandal is one of the most offensive moves that I have ever heard of,” Foreman said in the email. “This is yet more money out of the general fund that should have gone to educate our students. If Mr. Fernandez wanted a public relations expert, he should have paid for this himself.”

Tonight’s meeting will be held in the Centinela Valley Center for the Arts on the campus of Lawndale High School, 14901 S. Inglewood Ave., Lawndale.



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