

## Students speak up on controversy over Centinela Valley superintendent pay

By Rob Kuznia, *The Daily Breeze*  
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The controversy roiling the Centinela Valley Union High School District over the extraordinary compensation package of the superintendent has energized teachers, taxpayers, politicians and school officials for weeks, but this week's school board meeting added a new group of stakeholders to the fray: students.

Among the hundreds of people who attended Tuesday night's meeting was a sizable contingent of students from the three comprehensive high schools that make up the district: Hawthorne, Leuzinger and Lawndale. Many of them sat in the center aisle, holding placards bearing an image of Superintendent Jose Fernandez over the word "dictator."

Fernandez, who has been the target of intense scrutiny since a Feb. 9 story in the Daily Breeze revealed that his total compensation in 2013 amounted to more than \$663,000, volunteered to take a pay cut at the meeting. But it wasn't enough to assuage many in the audience, including students, who took the microphone at the Centinela Valley Center for the Arts in Lawndale to compare his affluence to their poverty.

High school senior Fatima Alvarez said her mother, like many parents of students in the district, doesn't speak English and works several jobs to make ends meet.

"A lot of people expect you guys to take care of us," she said, as the applause crescendoed to cheering. "But you don't. ... For you guys to take advantage of us, that's low! ... I know what it's like to not have a house, OK?"

By the end of her three-minute fulmination, the cheering was so loud it drowned out her voice coming through the auditorium's speaker system.

A student at Hawthorne High named Joshua who introduced himself as a leader of the marching band said he has decided not to perform for the board at the annual Youth Day Parade in Lawndale.

"As a student at Hawthorne High, I feel that you are abusing your powers as board members and as superintendent," he said. "So your request to have the Hawthorne marching band play in the parade for you, I myself, as a leader in the band have decided that I'm not going to do that."

A senior at Leuzinger High complained that soccer fields at the school lack turf.

"We have mud on our fields," the student said. "We have to go to other schools because they have turf."

Richard Vargas, a senior at Lawndale High, said the music department there could use a financial boost.

"Every time I walk into the band room, I see nothing but broken guitars, broken equipment, broken drum sticks and broken hearts," he said. "It disgusts me knowing that my teacher has to pay for all the repairs and stuff."

Vargas said the school has one full-time teacher and one part-time teacher heading up a music program that includes chorus, beginning band, stage band, commercial music, ukulele club, drum line and color guard.

"Why can't we have another music teacher?"

He added, "The music concerts we have here, we still have to pay for them. And when we pay for those, where does that money go? Probably to him. Now that you've heard my side of the story, Mr. Jose Fernandez, what's your side?"

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