

Has Centinela Valley's school board been duped?: Breaking View

By the Los Angeles News Group editorial board
Monday, March 31, 2014

DailyBreeze.com

The Daily Breeze (<http://www.dailybreeze.com>)

Has Centinela Valley's school board been duped?: Breaking View



As our reporters continue to uncover wanton overspending by the Centinela Valley school district in so many budget areas, it's reasonable to conclude that the board members are either dupes of those who are extracting so much money from the district, or are on the take.

With no evidence of wrongdoing at district headquarters, we have to surmise that the board members have been fooled. Repeatedly.

The superintendent took in \$663,000 in total compensation in 2013. "We would not knowingly give that high a salary," board member Hugo Rojas said at a board meeting last month. By his own admission then, they were duped.

Now comes word that the district has been spending 10 times as much on legal fees as nearby Redondo Beach Unified, which is about a third larger than Centinela Valley. Some of those legal fees, which averaged \$1.7 million a year over the past three years, went to the attorney or attorneys who prepared Superintendent Jose Fernandez's contract — the one that netted him that obscene compensation last year and a low-interest, \$910,000 loan from the district to buy a house in an exclusive neighborhood.

Some of those legal fees go to the attorneys who often sit in the audience at board meetings to answer legal questions, adding up to a lot of billable hours that most school districts don't require.

And some of the fees even go to the attorneys who help keep school board members in line. When then-board member Sandra Suarez asked in 2011 how much the district was spending on legal fees with its top law firm and what duties it was performing, the firm gave her 125 pages of invoices that were redacted — blacked out to keep the elected representative of the public from seeing what the district had been billed for, leaving only the dollar amounts. Not only that, but the law firm, Dannis Woliver Kelley, charged the district \$744 for responding to her request — charging for all that redacting, no doubt.

Later, when her fellow board members issued a formal letter of reprimand to Suarez, saying she had overstepped her authority in several respects, it cited the her request to review legal invoices and characterized it as "disruptive."

It appears that it doesn't pay to question the district's well-compensated law firms. The message appears to be that board members should just sit there and be good little dupes.

URL:

<http://www.dailybreeze.com/opinion/20140331/has-centinela-valleys-school-board-been-duped-break>

© 2014 The Daily Breeze (<http://www.dailybreeze.com>)