

Live Coverage: Centinela Valley school board to vote on interim superintendent to fill in for Jose Fernandez

By Rob Kuznia, *The Daily Breeze*
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Members at tonight's meeting also expected to name interim chief

The Centinela Valley school board tonight is scheduled to begin the process of hiring an investigative agency to review the controversial contract of Superintendent Jose Fernandez, who was placed on paid leave last week amid a firestorm of criticism for his hefty compensation last year.

The five-member board overseeing three comprehensive high schools in Lawndale and Hawthorne also is expected to appoint an interim superintendent to take the reins during the investigation.

The [agenda](#) doesn't name the proposed successor, but some believe that it will be Bob Cox, 66, the district's assistant superintendent of human resources, who took the helm in an unofficial capacity last week after Fernandez's surprise departure left an immediate void.

Fernandez, 54, has come under fire for drawing more than [\\$663,000 in compensation](#) last year, as well as exercising an option in his contract that enabled him to take a low-interest \$910,000 loan from the 6,600-student district to purchase a home in Ladera Heights.

Tonight's meeting will start at 5:45 p.m. at the Centinela Valley Center for the Arts in Lawndale with the reorganization of the board, presumably in part to elect a president to replace Maritza Molina, who has held that title only since December. School boards typically reorganize immediately after an election; it's unclear why this move is planned now.

However, Molina has been a steadfast supporter of Fernandez, penning a [letter to the editor](#) to the Daily Breeze defending his accomplishments a few days after this news organization revealed his level of total compensation in an article Feb. 9.

The board is expected to create a committee among board members that will interview investigative agencies or law firms to review Fernandez's employment contract, which also granted him a 9 percent annual raise for "longevity."

Then board members will vote on whether to hire a law firm before convening in closed session to discuss the interim superintendent.

The board's decision last week to put Fernandez on leave was a surprise move. The board — which

approved his contract in late 2009 — had seemed generally supportive of Fernandez until the meeting Wednesday, when it **reversed course** without explanation after a three-hour closed-door meeting.

Board members have said there will be a full investigation into Fernandez's employment contract, but haven't elaborated much beyond that.

Meanwhile, the **FBI has initiated a probe**, reaching out to people with close ties to the district, sources say. It's unclear what the agency is looking into, and a spokesperson for the FBI would neither confirm nor deny an investigation.

Fernandez's personal items have been removed from his office.

Teachers union President Jack Foreman believes Fernandez is gone for good, noting in a mass email to the membership Sunday night that he has turned in his keys.

"Many have questioned why it took so long to figure this out, but we were dealing with the most deceptive and sneaky individual that I have ever met," he wrote. "Requests for records were answered with only vaguely related documents or even requests for copying fees."

Foreman added that Fernandez's departure "is only a step."

"The board must name an interim superintendent," he said in the email. "This time we need to insist that a proper search be conducted for a superintendent. We need to find someone who is outstanding, and is focused on helping our community rather than on taking from our community."

There is at least one significant item of business listed deep on the consent calendar, a batch of items typically approved together without discussion. This would be the promotion of Lawndale High Principal Joseph Guidetti to the district's director of pupil services.

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