

## Downward spiral grips Centinela Valley school board: Editorial

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The same day the poster boy of municipal corruption, former Bell city manager Robert Rizzo, was sentenced to prison, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office [confirmed it has launched an investigation](#) into Centinela Valley Union High School District.

In case you are counting, that makes three agencies looking into the district — the FBI, the DA and the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

The cases have an eerily similar outline — outrageous salaries, small public agencies and, of course, greed. And though a chapter seems to be closing in Bell, another is opening at the district's Lawndale offices.

The exorbitantly paid superintendent of the Centinela Valley school district, Jose Fernandez, [finally got the boot](#) — put on paid leave this week. Next up: members of the school board who created the problem and seem only to be making things worse.

A few residents agree. “You must go,” and “[resign, thieves](#),” the small but incensed crowd called to the school board on Tuesday. Board members spent about three hours behind closed doors before announcing that Fernandez, whose compensation package was bigger than President Barack Obama's, would be replaced by Bob Cox, the assistant superintendent of human resources. Cox, who came in at the same time as Fernandez, is seen by some as too aligned with his tarnished former boss. That only plays to the community's distrust of the board.

The rowdy meeting was a good metaphor for just how far the small district has spiraled downward. The board members, four of whom approved the twice-bankrupt Fernandez's compensation package of about \$663,000 and a \$910,000 home loan at an interest rate of 2 percent to boot, look incompetent at best.

With little explanation the board reorganized itself during the meeting, then its new president, Hugo Rojas, said he was willing to cooperate with the FBI.

The whole thing was starting to play out like bad reality TV. And just in that fashion, there was no script. The agenda for the dual school board meeting held Tuesday, one special and the other a regular session, wasn't fully posted on the district's website ahead of time.

In the meantime, the board voted to begin the process to hire a law firm for a forensic audit of Fernandez's employment contract. It would have helped if they had paid attention from the beginning instead of committing public funds to investigate their own. Then there's the board and superintendent life-insurance

policies that were not reported to the IRS. The district paid \$90,000 for two whole life insurance policies for Fernandez, worth \$1.75 million, while board members got term life insurance policies of \$150,000.

Hanging over all of this is the sketchy relationship board members have with the construction firm TELACU that bankrolled many of their campaigns. Fernandez isn't the only one who needs to answer to the public.

What's missing in all this? Did you hear children or education mentioned? No.

There is no more school in this board. It is in disarray, the public has lost confidence and questions of legality abound. It's time for not only a change but an overhaul.

Pull the plug.

**URL:**

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