

Centinela Valley leaders beginning to undo decisions of embattled Superintendent Jose Fernandez

By Rob Kuznia, *The Daily Breeze*
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Centinela Valley school officials who have taken the helm while their suspended leader, Jose Fernandez, is being [investigated for excessive pay](#) are making swift changes in his absence, undoing some of his more controversial decisions.

Interim Superintendent Bob Cox confirmed Friday that he and his cabinet are working to reinstate summer school, settle a long-simmering lawsuit with the teachers union and reverse course on a move that required students to take just one year of P.E. instead

of the customary two.

“Our message in the last three weeks has been it is not business as usual in Centinela Valley,” Cox said. “We have pledged to work with our partners in both unions to get our district back on the most positive path possible.”

Word of the changes came in a bulletin sent Friday by teachers union President Jack Foreman to his membership with the subject line: “New reasons to celebrate!”

“This has been one of the best weeks we have had in (the Centinela Valley School Teachers Association) in memory,” he wrote.

Cox cautioned that the details have yet to be finalized on all three matters, but said the district is moving swiftly toward completion on them.

The district eliminated summer school in 2009 in what was characterized as a cost-saving measure. The move was particularly devastating in a district that at the time had a dropout rate of 30 percent. (It has since fallen to 18 percent.)

Ever since that decision, Foreman said, students have had to scramble to find other options.

“There was no way for kids to make up the classes over the summer,” he said. “There was a tiny program at Leuzinger for special-education students. ... But for the other kids who weren’t special ed, it was just, ‘good luck.’ ”

Cox and his cabinet also are maneuvering to drop a 3-year-old case against the teachers union, in which the district has been challenging the release time granted to the president to conduct union business.

In particular, the district was seeking about \$100,000 from the union in recompense for time the district believes it is owed for what the district says was unauthorized leave time used by past union presidents.

The district had lost every battle in the war, starting with a 2012 ruling by the Public Employment Relations Board in favor of the teachers union. The district later took another crack at it by filing a case in Los Angeles County Superior Court.

“Late yesterday afternoon we received word from our CTA lawyers that they had negotiated a settlement between CVSTA and the district that is entirely favorable to CVSTA,” Foreman said in the newsletter. “We had a court date scheduled for yesterday; but it sounds like the agreement was reached out of court. In any case, what I know now is that the district’s case against us is over. And our settlement against them that was handed down in our favor by the Public Employees Relations Board stands.”

The district in 2011 decimated its physical education program. The move took advantage of a loophole in the law that enables school districts in California to require just one year of P.E. in high school instead of the customary two.

The move resulted in the layoff of seven P.E. teachers. Greg Fuller, one of the laid-off teachers, said the students in Centinela suffered.

“We are a low-income minority school district and cant ignore the fact that our students lack nutrition and physical activity,” he said in an email.

He added that just 18 percent of the district’s students passed the one-mile run portion of the fitness test.

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