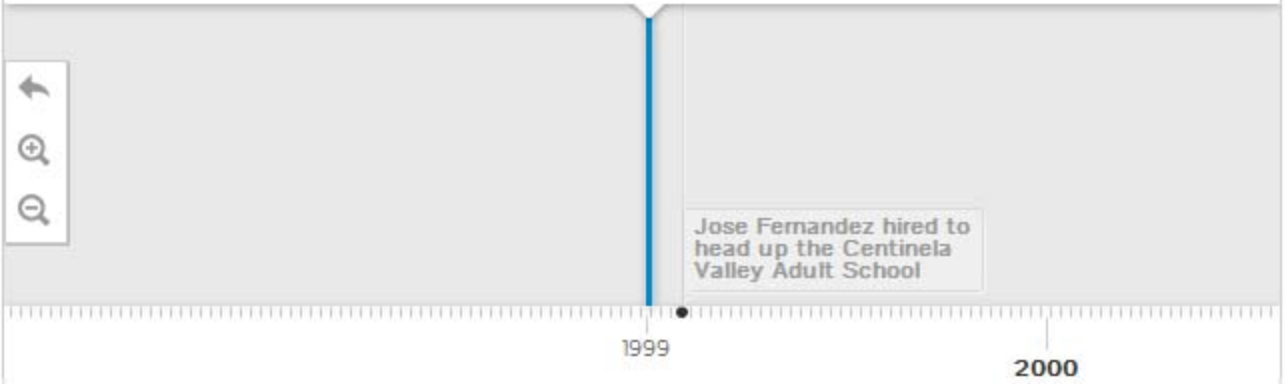
Centinela Valley school district timeline: A history of administrative controversy and political battles

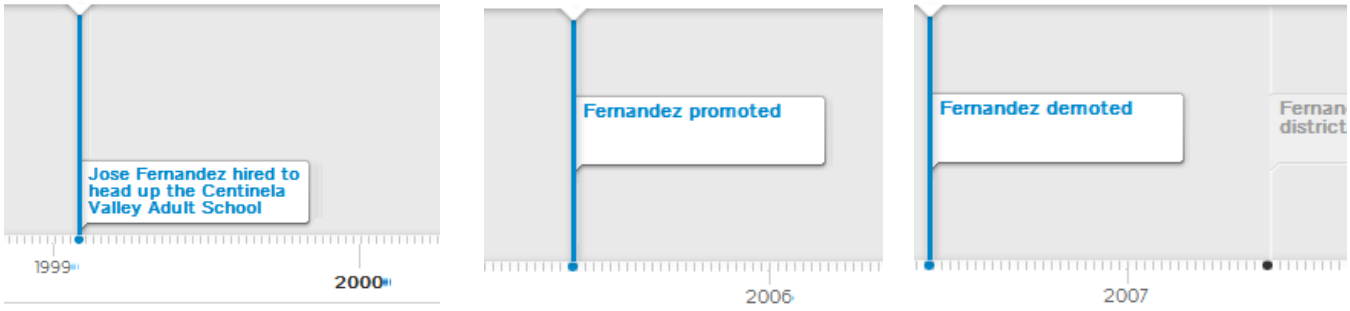
How Centinela Valley school district's superintendent pay grew to $663,000

The recent uproar over Centinela Valley School District Superintendent Jose Fernandez's compensation package, which amounted to $663K in 2013, is rooted in events that occurred over the past few years in the sometimes tumultuous district. This timeline traces significant events in the district dating back to 2007. Read more about our investigation of CVUHSD.

Stephen Carr/Daily Breeze

Superintendent Jose Fernandez





February 1999

Jose Fernandez hired to head up the Centinela Valley Adult School

A lifelong South Bay resident and 1979 graduate of the now-shuttered Lennox High School, Fernandez had been assistant director at the Norwalk La Mirada Adult School.

June 2005

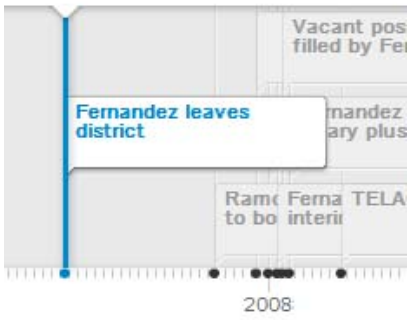
Fernandez promoted

Jose Fernandez promoted by Superintendent Cheryl White to assistant superintendent of business.

June 2006

Fernandez demoted

Jose Fernandez demoted by Superintendent Cheryl White to return back to the adult school, where he serves the remainder of his contract.



June 2007

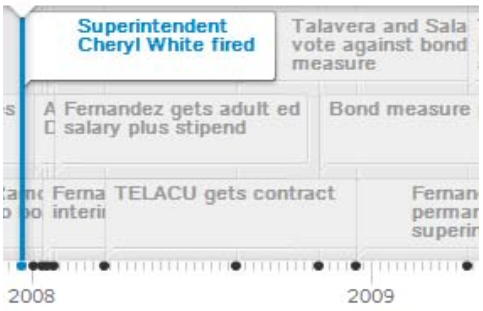
Fernandez leaves district

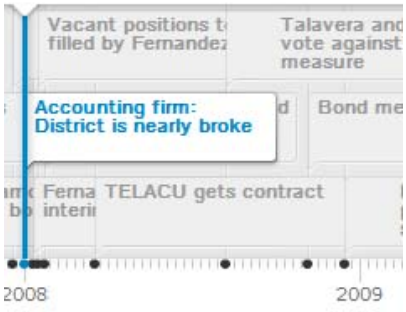
Jose Fernandez's employment contract expires; he leaves the district.

November 6, 2007

Ramos, Suarez elected to board

Centinela Valley Union High School District board changes dramatically as candidates Gloria Ramos and Sandra Suarez unseat Jorge Luis Arroyo and Rafael Ramirez. Both newcomers were backed by the teachers union, which had long been critical of Superintendent Cheryl White.





December 19, 2007

Superintendent Cheryl White fired

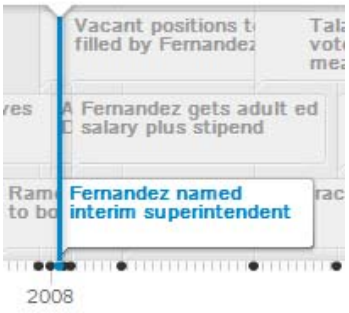
Superintendent Cheryl White is fired by a 3-2 vote. Just one week after being sworn in, Ramos and Suarez join two-year trustee Rocio Pizano to vote in favor of the firing, with Rudy Salas and Francisco Talaveras opposing. LaTanya Kirk-Carter, the district's business chief, is named interim superintendent.

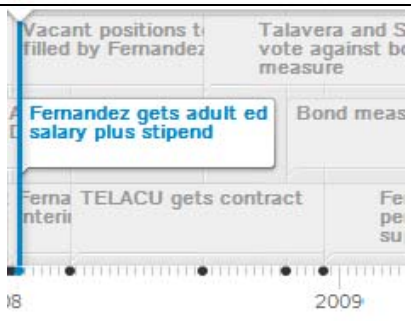
Cheryl White

January 2008

Accounting firm: District is nearly broke

An accounting firm report paints a dire picture of the district's finances, saying it is nearly broke.





January 10, 2008

Fernandez named interim superintendent

After voting to launch a search for a new and permanent chief, the board names Jose Fernandez, a district veteran who had headed up adult education programs from 1999 to 2007, as interim superintendent.

January 15, 2008

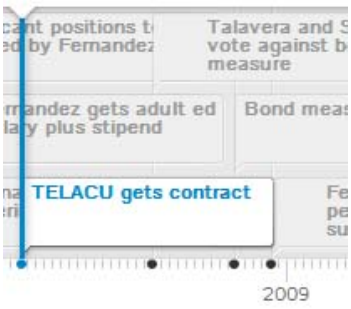
Vacant positions to be filled by Fernandez

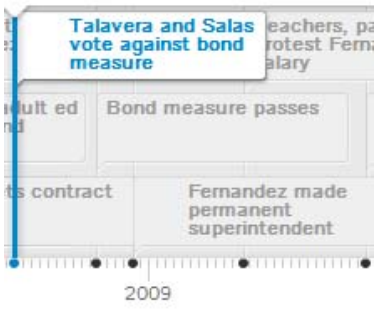
At its first board meeting led by interim Superintendent Jose Fernandez, he vows to move quickly to appoint an assistant superintendent of human resources, one of eight key management positions that had long been vacant at the district.

January 22, 2008

Fernandez gets adult ed salary plus stipend

The district hires Bob Cox (a long-time freelance columnist for the Daily Breeze) for human resources post, and agrees to pay Fernandez to continue to helm the adult education program at $143,000 a year while granting him a $7,300 stipend for his work as interim superintendent. Rudy Salas and Frank Talavera vote against the motion. Fired Superintendent Cheryl White continues to receive her $157,000 salary pending a permanent separation agreement.





March 17, 2008

TELACU gets contract

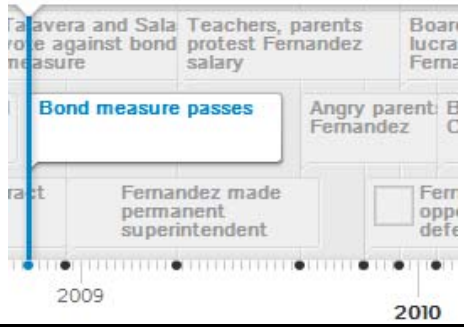
TELACU is hired as a consultant to manage construction projects. Later in the year, in November, voters approve Measure CV, a $98 million construction bond measure that generates money to rebuild schools.

August 7, 2008

Talavera and Salas vote against bond measure

Board members Francisco Talavera and Rudy Salas vote against putting a $98 million construction bond measure on the November ballot to upgrade school buildings. The other three board members vote in favor of it. The failure to get four board votes requires the bond measure to get two-thirds majority vote of the electorate in November election.

Rudy Salas



November 4, 2008

Bond measure passes

The Bond Measure CV passes with 70 percent of the vote, authorizing $98 million in construction upgrades at Lawndale and Hawthorne high schools. Read More

Centinela Vallley Measure CV passes

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By Nguyen Huy Vu Staff Writer

POSTED: 11/04/08, 9:00 PM PST | 0 COMMENTS

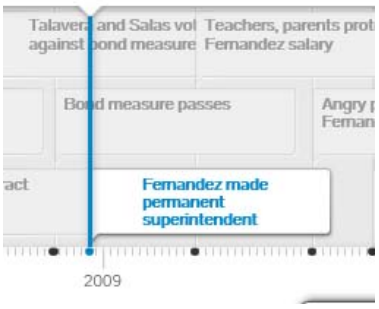
The cash-strapped Centinela Valley Union High School District was locked in a tight battle, but won passage of a $98 million bond measure Tuesday.

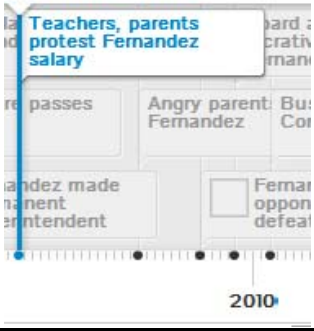
With all precincts reporting, Measure CV collected 70.33 percent of the vote against 29.67. It needed 66.6 percent needed for passage.

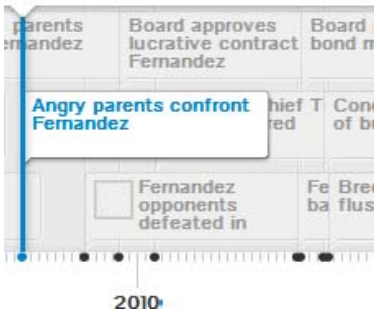
The plan would send Leuzinger High School more than $45 million, Hawthorne High School about $28 million and Lawndale High School around $19.4 million in campus upgrades. Another $5.4 million was slated for districtwide projects.

Property owners would pay $29.72 per $100,000 of assessed property value for an additional 20 years, or through 2057.

Interim Superintendent Jose Fernandez said that, with recent state infrastructure grants and matching funds, the district could receive a total of up to $200 million if the bond passes.







December 15, 2008

Fernandez made permanent superintendent

The board makes Jose Fernandez the district's permanent superintendent at a base salary of $163,000. Fernandez had been interim superintendent for about a year.

Jose Fernandez

April 14, 2009

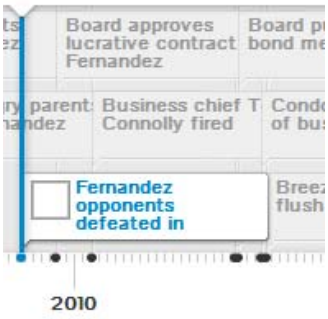
Teachers, parents protest Fernandez salary

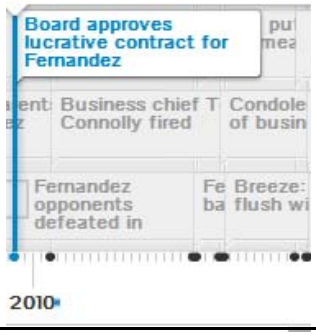
Teachers, parents and students march at Leuzinger High to protest Fernandez's 9 percent salary increase to $163,000 at a time when teachers were facing layoffs due to lack of funds.

August 25, 2009

Angry parents confront Fernandez

A group of angry parents confront Superintendent Jose Fernandez in the lobby of district offices. The parents stopped the superintendent as he was leaving a school board meeting and accused him of promoting administrative mismanagement and closed-door politics.





November 3, 2009

Fernandez opponents defeated in election

Fernandez opponents Salas and Talavera are defeated by Hugo Rojas and newcomer Maritza Molina in the school board election. Rojas and Molina receive heavy financial backing from construction management company TELACU. (Salas and Talavera had voted against putting a bond measure on the ballot in 2008.)

Maritza Molina

December 10, 2009

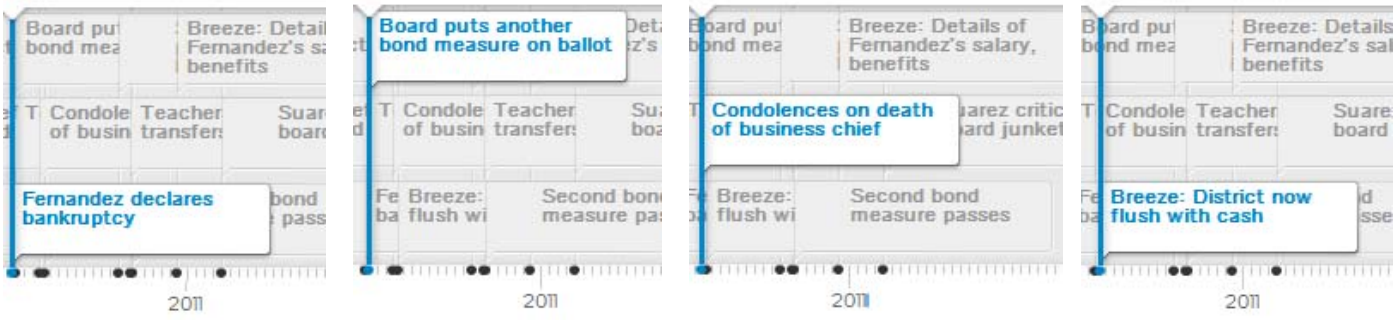
Board approves lucrative contract for Fernandez

The school board, including two new members who had been sworn in just days prior, votes 5-0 to approve a lucrative employment contract for Jose Fernandez. Board member Gloria Ramos refuses to sign the contract, even though she voted to approve it.

January 19, 2010

Business chief Tom Connolly fired

The board fires district business chief Tom Connolly, replacing him with Angelita Dalan. Dalan becomes the district's seventh business chief in seven years.



June 28, 2010

Fernandez declares bankruptcy

After the failure of a family business, Fernandez and his wife declare bankruptcy. According to the filing, the couple had accumulated $3 million in debt — more than twice the value of their assets. The family also was living beyond its means — spending $17,000 a month while Fernandez's job as superintendent brought in $13,000 monthly.

July 2010

Board puts another bond measure on ballot

School board votes unanimously to put another $98 million construction bond measure on the ballot for school buildings. Like the bond measure for the same amount approved by voters in 2008, this one is called Measure CV.

July 27, 2010

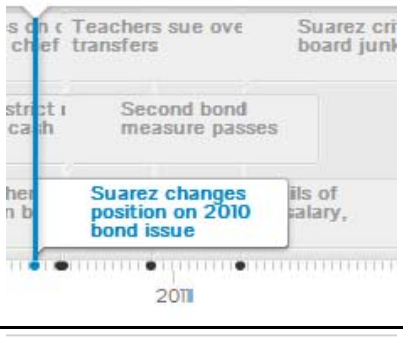
Condolences on death of business chief

Board members and Superintendent Jose Fernandez express condolences to the family of business chief Angelita Dalan, who died on July 4 of heart failure at age 64.

August 1, 2010

Breeze: District now flush with cash

Daily Breeze story reports the once nearly bankrupt district is now flush with cash. Jose Fernandez's salary is reported as $218,000.



October 18, 2010

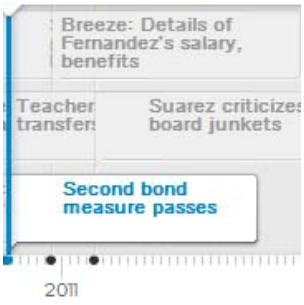
Suarez changes position on 2010 bond issue

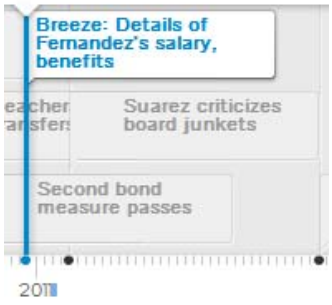
Board member Sandra Suarez changes position on Measure CV bond issue scheduled for November election when she learns it will result in razing of older Leuzinger High buildings.

November 2010

Teachers sue over transfers

Teachers union files lawsuit over forced transfer of teachers to lower performing schools in the district.





November 2, 2010

Second bond measure passes

A second $98 million school construction bond Measure CV passes at the polls.TELACU will again be awarded the contract to manage the projects. Read More

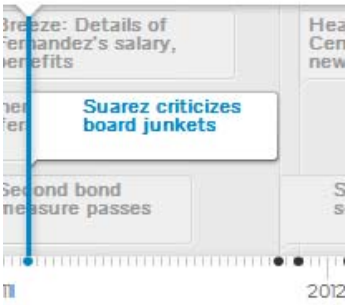
See Appendix A

December 20, 2010

Breeze: Details of Fernandez's salary, benefits

Daily Breeze reports on details of Superintendent Jose Fernandez's $241,000 salary, including stipends and access to a 40-year, fixed-rate 2 percent housing loan. Read More

See Appendix B



February 6, 2011

Suarez criticizes board junkets

Board member Sandra Suarez criticizes costly out-of-state trips taken by her four board colleagues and Superintendent Fernandez. Read More

See Appendix C

Sandra Suarez

November 8, 2011

Suarez loses board seat

Outspoken board member Sandra Suarez loses her seat on the board to newcomer Lorena Gonzalez, who was backed by funding from Citizens for Better Schools, a little-known group funded by bond measure proponent TELACU. Gloria Ramos wins re-election. Read More

See Appendix D

Lorena Gonzalez

November 30, 2011

Head finance officer at Centinela Valley takes new job

After less than a year-and-a-half on the job, Assistant Superintendent of Business James Pham leaves the district and takes a position as director of fiscal services at the K-8 Little Lake City School District. In so doing, he also takes a voluntary pay cut, from $143,000 in Centinela to about $100,000 with his new employers. Pham can't be reached for comment. Read More *See Appendix E*

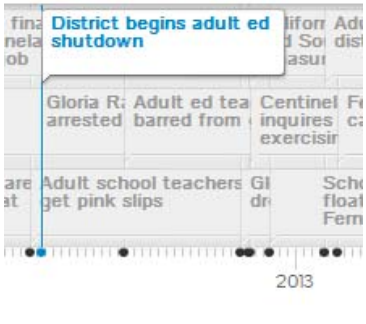
January 23, 2012

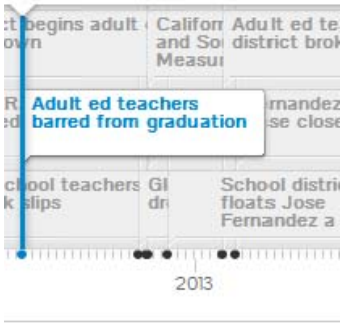
Gloria Ramos arrested

Board member Gloria Ramos is arrested for allegedly assaulting her niece in Hawthorne. A judge later threw out the case, and all charges were dropped. Read More

See Appendix F

Gloria Ramos





March 6, 2012

Adult school teachers get pink slips

At a special school board meeting, the district says it sent layoff notices to most of its adult school teachers as a pre-emptive measure in case California voters fail to approve Prop. 30 tax hike to fund education in November. Read More *See Appendix G*

March 19, 2012

District begins adult ed shutdown

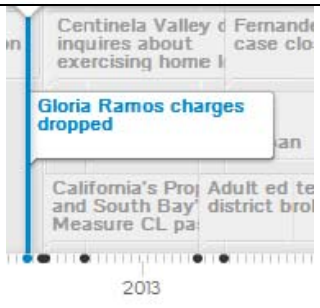
Centinela Valley officials begin shutting down the district's adult education program, with plans to lay off 85% of its staff. Read More *See Appendix H*

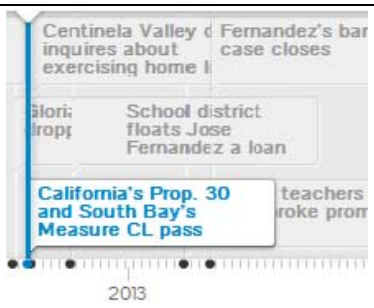
June 19, 2012

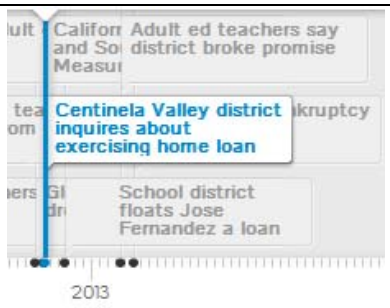
Adult ed teachers barred from graduation

Adult education teachers are angered when they are barred from speaking at graduation ceremonies. Read More

See Appendix I







October 29, 2012

Gloria Ramos charges dropped

The assault case against board member Gloria Ramos is dropped.

November 6, 2012

California's Prop. 30 and South Bay's Measure CL pass

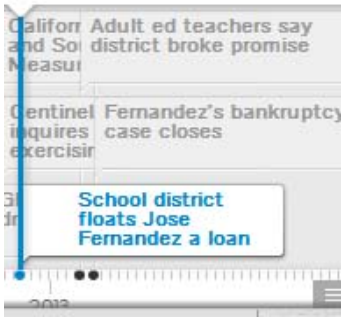
South Bay voters pass Measure CL, a parcel tax benefiting Centinela Valley and four other school districts. California voters approve Proposition 30, a temporary tax hike to benefit education. Read More

See Appendix J

November 8, 2012

Centinela Valley district inquires about exercising home loan option for Fernandez

In a letter to then-school board President Rocio Pizano, attorneys with Dannis Woliver Kelley inquire about exercising a clause in the contract for Superintendent Jose Fernandez that entitles him to a low-interest loan from the school district for purchasing a home. The letter is dated Nov. 8, 2012 – two days after voters in the district approved a parcel tax.



November 30, 2012

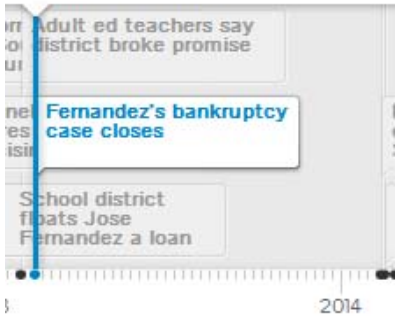
School district floats Jose Fernandez a loan to purchase house

The Centinela Valley Union High School District gives Fernandez a $910,000 loan to purchase a home in Ladera Heights for the same amount, after he lost his home during bankruptcy proceedings. He has 40 years to pay it off at 2 percent interest. Read More

See Appendix K

Brad Graverson/Daily Breeze

The Ladera Heights home owned by Jose Fernandez.



February 1, 2013

Adult ed teachers say district broke promise

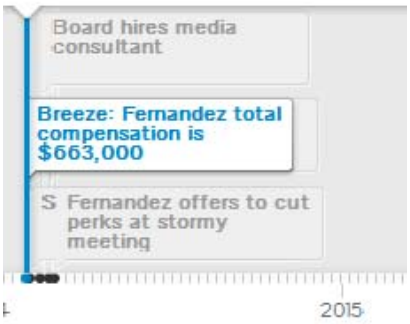
Adult education teachers accuse the district of breaking its promise to reopen adult school classes if the state bond issue passed in November 2012. Read More

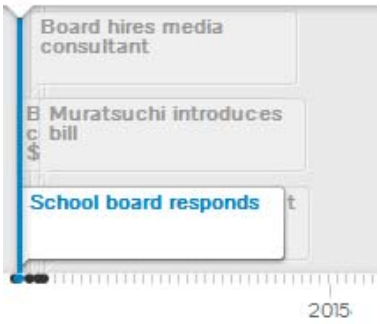
See Appendix L

February 15, 2013

Fernandez's bankruptcy case closes

Through the bankruptcy process, the family was largely relieved of its debt, though they lost their home. With the help of the loan from the district, they were able to move into a new house about a mile and a half away from their old one.





February 9, 2014

Breeze: Fernandez total compensation is $663,000

The Daily Breeze runs a front-page story detailing Jose Fernandez's compensation package of $663,000 for calendar year 2013, far more than any other school superintendent in Los Angeles county. Read More

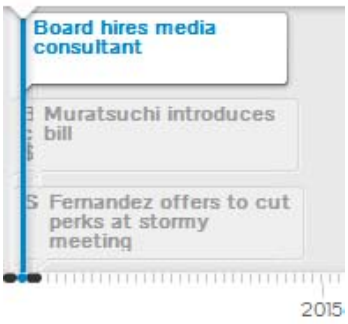
See Appendix M

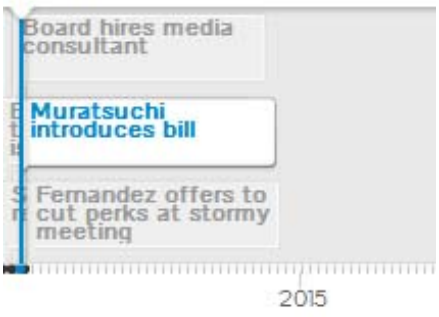
February 14, 2014

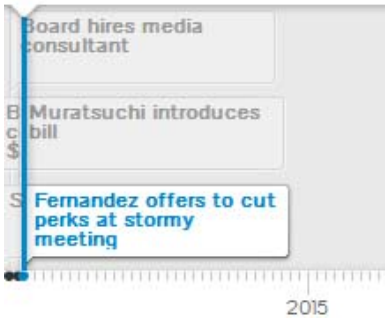
School board responds

School board president Maritza Molina submits a response to the Daily Breeze detailing "remarkable strides" for the district under Fernandez's leadership and lamenting the scrutiny of the superintendent's compensation package. Read More

See Appendix N







February 25, 2014

Board hires media consultant

The school board votes to hire media consultant John Schwada at a cost not to exceed $24,000 to mitigate the negative reaction to reports about Fernandez's compensation. Read More

See Appendix O

March 6, 2014

Muratsuchi introduces bill

State Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi introduces a bill in the California Assembly aimed at preventing "excessive school superintendent compensation packages." Read More

See Appendix P

March 11, 2014

Fernandez offers to cut perks at stormy meeting

Rob Kuznia
28d

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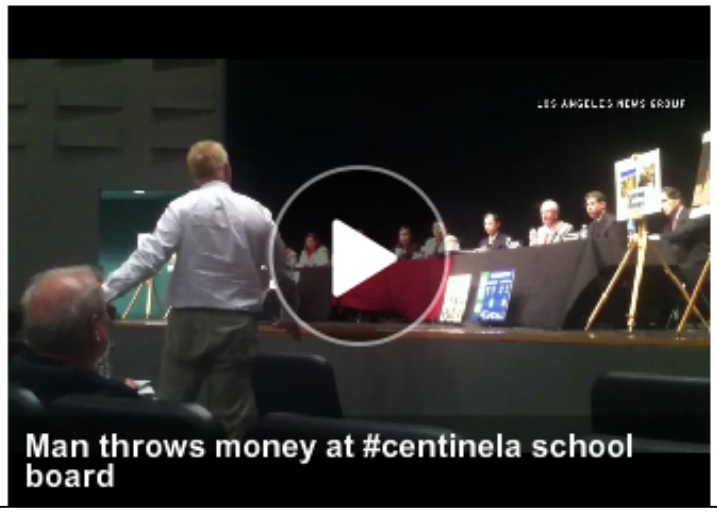

Jose Fernandez offers to cut perks, lowering his salary to $295,000, at a contentious Centinela Valley school board meeting punctuated by angry comments from community residents. Read More

See Appendix Q