

LAUREN SUE

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EDUCATION

University of Missouri Bachelor of Journalism in Convergence Media and Multicultural Certificate, May 2010

EXPERIENCE

Senior Editor and Publisher, Honeycomb Moms, Atlanta, Ga. **May 2018- Present**

- Manage six content creators, edit their work, and write about three stories each week to build a content log
- Use Google Analytics to track metrics and inform coverage
- Create and update a registry of Black pediatricians in multiple cities to promote diversity in the medical field

Senior Staff Writer, Daily Kos, Oakland, Calif. **Nov 2019- Nov 2022**

- Leverage more than 10 years of experience in print journalism to tell compelling opinion pieces that accounted for 6.7% of Daily Kos traffic among the site's top 10 writers between January and September 2022
- Highlight the trickledown effects of white supremacy on criminal justice, education, housing, and healthcare
- Document police brutality and racial profiling using lawsuits, police reports, and other public records

Equity Council Co-Chair, Daily Kos, Oakland, Calif. **July 2021- Nov 2022**

- Manage more than a dozen employees representing every department of the company to prioritize equity
- Inform creation of a Supervising Senior Editor position to help set the site's editorial agenda
- Monitor metrics and analyze content to attract more readers to work spotlighting marginalized communities
- Lead weekly Equity Council meetings using a consensus-based decision-making process to address white supremacy—the mother of implicit bias, ableism, microaggressions, and other equity issues
- Build a system to respond to inequity-based harm and arm reporters with tools to catch problematic language
- Develop a plan to use multimedia reporting and newsgathering strategies to prioritize diversity of voice, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and race on deadline
- Review organizational documents, practices, policies, and communication norms to align with equity goals
- Oversee budgeting, programming, and communication processes to [educate the wider staff](#)
- Use banner space to highlight marginalized groups and cultural observances each month

Staff Writer, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta, Ga. **January 2016- April 2018**

- Balance breaking news, weather, and entertainment reporting to write between four and seven stories a day
- Produce 15.2 million page views, the second highest number for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, in 2017
- Write 10 stories in February 2016 that attracted a combined 1.06 million page views on AJC.com
- Use incident reports, warrants, police narratives, and summaries to write crime stories for five metro counties

Staff Writer, The Bakersfield Californian, Bakersfield, Calif. **March 2014- November 2015**

- Write K-12, community college, and university education stories that trend weekly on Bakersfield.com
- Use lawsuits, salary data, budgets, and other public records to facilitate enterprise and data-driven storytelling
- Create a weekly, one-page print spread that was consistently among the most read for iPad and e-edition users

Staff Writer, Santa Maria Times, Santa Maria, Calif. **October 2012- February 2014**

- Write about eight articles a week covering six K-12 school districts and two community colleges
- Use public records including charter school budgets, check registrars, state investigation decisions and appeals

Staff Writer, Jackson Sun, Jackson, Tenn. **September 2010- February 2012**

- Cover a daily county and city government beat and regularly break news stories in a 13-county coverage area
- Use public records including inmate logs, employee applications, letters of resignation and evaluations

SKILLS

Amplitude, Canva, Chartbeat, Google Analytics, Hootsuite, Microsoft Office, Pinterest, Tailwind and WordPress

MEMBERSHIPS/ AWARDS

A GO Team parent representative of Tuskegee Airmen Global Academy; a former reporter in the New York Times Student Journalism Institute; a recipient of four Jackson Sun Award of Excellence certificates for teamwork and watchdog reporting (2010/2011), a first place 2011 Gannett Quarterly Award for Outstanding Writing, a first place 2012 Gannett Award of Excellence in watchdog reporting and an honorable mention award in the Freedom of Information category of the Tennessee Associated Press Media Editors contest (2012); a Gannett breaking news finalist in a 2012 quarterly excellence contest for team reporting; and a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Target HOPE, and the National Association of Black Journalists

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CLIPS

['You should pay for your food': Karen inserts herself in the wrong Black woman's business](#)

[Remember Obama said defunding police was problematic slogan? Poll results show he may've been right](#)

[Stacey Abrams makes Brian Kemp eat every one of his horrible policy decisions in final debate](#)

[Expert witness subtly pokes major hole in Chauvin defense: How an alleged fake \\$20 ends in any force](#)

['Be well because our wellness matters, not because the white gaze matters': A word from Bernice King](#)

[Toddler's kidney transplant stalled due to dad's latest arrest](#)

[Inside the Common Core classroom](#)

The Bakersfield Californian

BC president's fight with district has deep roots

BY LAUREN FOREMAN lforeman@bakersfield.com Aug 29, 2015

It's no secret Bakersfield College President Sonya Christian's job is on the line.

The Californian reported earlier this month that her boss, Kern Community College District Chancellor Sandra Serrano, wasn't happy with her management style. Essentially, Christian jumped the chain of command to make some hires and had to dip into BC's very large reserve fund to cover those costs.

Because of those actions, the district said, she put BC into deficit spending — a big no no.

Serrano even went so far as to recommend on Christian's job performance evaluation that she should look for work in a one-college district. That way she would have the authority she seeks at KCCD, Serrano wrote.

As bad as that is, the rift between KCCD and BC appears to run even deeper.

Some have begun to question if BC would be better off on its own, out from under the KCCD umbrella, which includes Porterville College and Cerro Coso Community College.

Meanwhile, Christian's contract is up in February 2016. Since her evaluation, there has been no further action or statements from the board, making it almost certain that BC could be looking for its 7th president in just 11 years.

But BC employees in the know say KCCD is wrong. That Christian's actions didn't harm BC's fiscal house and were necessary because of the district's own sluggish attitude toward hiring, which was potentially more harmful to the college.

To understand what's really going on, critics say, follow the money.

READY, AIM, HIRE

First, the human resource hires. Christian hired two new HR workers this year, bumping the total up to five. The district's take on the hires was that they were unnecessary because KCCD already provides HR services. But KCCD critics counter Christian had to beef up the campus department because the district's HR had repeatedly dropped the ball on hiring in a timely manner.

The college ended up "in essence paying twice for a service KCCD is supposed to provide," said an

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employee who has served on the school's budget allocation committee. The employee asked not to be named for fear of job retaliation.

Those weren't the only hiring issues to cause trouble.

For example, district critics say, the state offered BC \$452,000 to hire counselors and educational advisors, something the campus sorely needed. BC ran the positions through KCCD's HR department but nothing happened.

To college officials, KCCD took so long to approve the positions, it missed the deadline and squandered BC's chance at that \$452,000.

KCCD's side is that the state took too long to explain the guidelines it needed to follow in order to get the money and that caused a delay for not only BC but other community colleges as well.

Either way, BC had to pay out of pocket for those counselors and advisors instead of using state money.

Another of Christian's disputed actions was to tap BC reserves to hire adjunct faculty and offer additional classes last year.

Her expectation was that BC would be reimbursed by the state, according to the unnamed employee.

In an email to *The Californian* Aug. 14 the employee wrote:

"We fully expected that the earnings allocated from the state for those classes would be returned to BC's savings account, but KCCD did not allow that. As a result, the savings account was low, and we were labeled with the crime of deficit spending."

BC's reserves are actually a healthy 9 percent of the college's expenses. And Tom Burke, KCCD's chief financial officer, confirmed that college presidents are allowed to spend those reserves as they see fit. That's not a district matter.

Even so, Christian's performance evaluation written in June 2015 clearly reflects the district's disapproval of her actions. In addition to the hiring issues, the district states that Christian reassigned staff without KCCD approval, failed to meet budget deadlines and didn't work within district procedures.

"Regardless of Dr. Christian's talents and accomplishments, her leadership style is not compatible with the procedures and thus operations of a multi-college district," the evaluation says.

Both Christian and Serrano declined to comment.

THE FACULTY FIGHT

The unnamed employee said Christian has been fighting an uphill battle against years of mismanagement and has had to act because KCCD wouldn't.

BC's Academic Senate President Steven Holmes agreed, saying BC's faculty also has been fighting over hiring delays at the district level for more than a year.

The Senate has put six resolutions before the KCCD board since April 2014 rallying behind Christian's leadership and seeking to clean up district procedures.

The Senate would like a performance evaluation of the district's HR department and an answer as to why it can take up to seven months to make a hire.

The Academic Senate also pushed to develop a system for evaluating KCCD operations that includes BC faculty input.

Holmes said the district was looking at spending \$700,000 on HR positions in May 2014, when the faculty passed a resolution to fight the spending.

Faculty leaders have also sought, without success, to lower the amount of required reserves from the district's minimum of 15 percent to the state's minimum of 5 percent. That's in addition to a KCCD savings

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requirement that each school have 3 percent of its expenses in cash on hand. KCCD's reserve funding was 38.7 percent of its expenses and more than twice the state average of 18 percent in 2014, according to the summary of general fund transactions. That's down to about 23 percent now, Burke said.

TO SECEDE OR NOT?

The feud between the district and Christian brings up a bigger question of whether BC needs the district. Holmes, for one, said the district isn't earning its keep and BC's getting shafted.

BC pays two-thirds of the cost of district services, which is fair as BC students make up about two-thirds of the district's total student population. But the district kicks back less than half its money to BC even though most of that funding comes from the BC's growing enrollment, according to state and local data from this and last year's budgets.

And KCCD's operating budget has increased more than \$750,000 each year since at least 2013-2014, according to budget documents. KCCD officials budgeted \$10.8 million for operations in 2015-2016. That's \$828,065 more than the 2014-2015 budget of \$9.9 million.

That money doesn't pay for instructors and classes.

It pays for business, legal, educational planning, research, HR and legal services; salaries and benefits for employees in the chancellor's office and board members; and governmental and external affairs services. Burke said that structure actually saves money for each college in the district (BC, Porterville and Cerro Coso) as it centralizes general operations.

"Providing a service once rather than three separate times for each college is an effective, cost-saving model used by multi-college community college districts throughout California," he wrote in an email.

BC employees argue that since KCCD evaluates the cost effectiveness of its own services, it's difficult to say that structure results in cost savings for the individual colleges.

Holmes said he hopes the uncertainty with Christian's contract doesn't stop the president from asking questions and leading in the way she has.

Christian will stay on as BC's president through the fall semester. But who will lead BC come mid-2016 when her contract is up is an open question.

ENROLLMENT COUNTS

Most community college funding comes from the state, which determines how much to give each college based on enrollment and growth.

KCCD — as the fiscal entity for BC, Cerro Coso Community College and Porterville College — gets most of the state funding first and redistributes it based on the size of the school, whether it operates an educational center and other factors, explained Amber Chiang, BC's spokeswoman.

"It's a point of constant conversation because of BC's size," Chiang said.

BC enrolled nearly 19,000 students this fall, the college's highest enrollment in eight years, Chiang said Monday. That's 7 percent more students than it enrolled last year.

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BC normally enrolls about twice as many students as the other KCCD campuses combined. But it gets about 45 percent of the money, according to state and local data from this and last year's budgets.

WHAT BC LEADERS THINK OF CHRISTIAN

More than 400 faculty, staff members and administrators attended BC's annual Opening Day celebration last Thursday.

Many of them stood to cheer President Sonya Christian as she gave her State of the College presentation.

Christian's leadership has meant more grant funding and innovative programs, educators and students said before the presentation.

Janel Orozco, vice president of BC's Student Government Association (SGA), said Christian pushes the SGA to hold as many events as it wants. That isn't always the case with administrators, Orozco said.

She was part of a group of about 10 students, including SGA President Clayton Fowler, who showed up at a KCCD board meeting last Thursday to advocate for Christian.

"All of this is about student success, and the data shows she's helped improve that," Orozco said.

Andrea Thorson, vice president of BC's Academic Senate, said waiting several months (the board's projected timeline) to decide Christian's fate is unacceptable.

Thorson said 90 percent of employees (more than 240 BC workers) indicated Christian is a highly effective leader in a survey given as part of the college's mid-term accreditation report.

"The faculty has spoken," Thorson said. "We want our president back."

Remedial education costing community college students

BY LAUREN FOREMAN, Californian staff writer lforeman@bakersfield.com

Two years ago, Lezlie Cranston, 20, took a placement test at Bakersfield College that landed her four course levels below college writing and three behind in reading.

In math, her weaker area in high school, she was behind three academic levels.

"It's just, I don't test well," Cranston said.

The test results meant she had to complete more than two semesters of remedial courses. Taking the "academic development classes" pushed back her graduation — planned for this past spring — more than a year and will cost her family more than \$1,000 including the price tag of four remedial writing courses she still needs to complete.

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A statewide report released earlier this month by the nonprofit Campaign for College Opportunity shows Cranston is not alone: enrollment in pre-college level courses extends time in community college by more than a year and adds 20 extra needed credits, costing students thousands of dollars more.

Part of the problem is a disconnect between what students are learning in high school, what they need to know in college and how they are placed in college courses.

The problem is widespread.

Eighty-four percent of incoming Bakersfield College students must complete remedial courses before taking college math or English these days, according to Janet Fulks, a BC microbiology professor and student success researcher.

Very few of those students graduate anywhere close to on time.

Only 34.8 percent of BC students who took remedial courses in math or English in 2007- 2008 were eligible to transfer to four-year schools, earn degrees or receive certificates within six years, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office said earlier this year.

It was the lowest completion rate for unprepared students at the college in at least five years.

REAL COSTS OF REMEDIAL ED

Statewide, 40.5 percent of community college students who took remedial courses in math or English in 2007-2008 were eligible to transfer to four-year schools, earn degrees or receive certificates within six years.

The cost is high.

Community college students in the Los Angeles area who finish school on time spend about \$15,000 — Campaign for College Opportunity wrote in its report. Students who take three years to finish two-year degrees pay about \$7,600 more, or \$22,700.

The cost more than doubles for students who take four years or more to earn a two-year degree.

Fulks, the BC instructor and researcher, said the problem is amplified in the Central Valley, where 80 percent of students are first-generation college attendees.

At Porterville College, 37.6 percent of students who took remedial math and English in 2007-2008 were eligible to graduate or transfer. The figure was 28.2 percent for Taft College and 37.2 percent for Cerro Coso Community College in Lake Isabella.

Fulks said they get stuck in a “remedial whirlpool.”

“They don't know why they're there. They don't know how to get out, and we know from the data that they fail,” Fulks said.

CHANGING PLACEMENT STRUCTURE:

Key to bringing down the number of students in remedial courses, Fulks said, is correctly determining which students need the courses in the first place.

Over the years, BC cut the number of advisors who place its approximately 8,000 students registering to four. It forced BC to rely mostly on a test to place students in courses despite state law requiring colleges to rely on multiple measures.

That's changing. The school is getting more state funding to hire two additional counselors and plans to hire two more.

BC also rolled out a new system this spring that bases student placement on high school GPA, grades from the highest level of high school math and English taken and placement test results.

Fulks said students can place a level higher on placement tests if they got a C in the highest level of English and a B in the highest level of math in high school.

“We saved over 800 semesters of student time,” Fulks said.

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Students would be better prepared for college, professors say, if they took four years of math in high school instead of the required three.

It's an aim local high schools are backing but not requiring.

THE NEED TO TARGET MATH

Kimberly Bligh, a remedial math, reading and writing instructor at BC, said a basic arithmetic class fills up three weeks after registration. About 90 percent of BC students have to take some level of remedial math.

Bligh said a fourth year of math in high school could significantly improve the amount of remediation needed in college.

It can, because of a change in BC policy, even help some students bypass remedial math — which like all other remedial classes doesn't count toward college graduation requirements.

Still, the Kern High School District — from which 65 percent of BC students graduate — is not discussing a change in math requirements, said Vickie Spanos, director of instruction for KHSD.

"I don't think we need to be discussing that necessarily," Spanos said. "What I think is those students that are pushing toward college are pushing toward that fourth year of math."

Cranston said she took three years of math but sees the benefit of four.

"It would help when you go into college," she said. "But I think the high schools are trying to give you some leeway."

Spanos added some students simply need remedial education. They don't have the knowledge or maturity to be successful in college courses.

PREPING KIDS FOR COLLEGE

Spanos said KHSD recently implemented changes targeting those unprepared students as well as those improperly placed in remedial courses.

Some of the changes — a heightened focus on literacy, new state standards for learning and new standardized testing in high school — are already happening, Spanos said. KHSD is also requiring all incoming freshman to take an English assessment test and bringing math teachers together to plan lessons to be used districtwide.

The high school district will also, starting this fall, have students develop long-term education plans in which they base their high school courseload on future goals.

And high school teachers and administrators will more closely collaborate with their local college and university counterparts.

"We're not a unified district," Spanos said. "We need to be a unified community of educators."

Salary vs. experience: KHSD teachers say pay falls short

BY LAUREN FOREMAN The Bakersfield Californian lforeman@bakersfield.com SATURDAY, NOV 15, 2014 3:00 PM

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Scott Lockhart, a math teacher at East High School, got married and had two kids in the seven years teachers went without a raise in the Kern High School District.

So when the district in April approved a 5 percent raise -- one percent in year one and 4 percent in 2014-2015 -- Lockhart was excited, to say the least. His annual salary jumped from \$57,308 to \$60,173 this year, according to a Californian analysis of KHSD salary data obtained June 5 through a public records request.

Lockhart said teachers could stand to make even more money. "I don't think we get what we deserve," he said.

What they will make this school year, on average, is \$72,058, according to the district. That's \$2,748 more than they averaged in 2013-2014. But in a district where half of employees with professional certification have at least 10 years of experience, educators say the number is low.

Lockhart, in his ninth year of teaching, said he comes to work each day at about 7:30 a.m. He teaches six periods and spends most of his 40-minute lunch break voluntarily teaching students coding and computer programming for a club he advises.

He gets home most days at about 4 p.m., grading papers and preparing lesson plans from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.

And he's no exception.

Cathy Adams, an upper-level math teacher at Frontier High School, said most weeks she spends 15 to 20 hours doing work outside normal school hours. She has 150 students. So even if she spends one minute per question grading one-question assignments, it's an easy 2 1/2 hours.

That said, one-question assignments are rare. "We do work hard," Adams said.

A teacher in her 25th year, she will make \$84,818 this school year, according to the KHSD database.

Median pay for teachers was \$58,836 last school year and will increase to \$61,189 this school year, according to Mike Zulfa, KHSD's associate superintendent of human resources.

He said the best lens to examine compensation is not gross annual income, but hourly compensation.

KHSD principals earn \$47.75 to \$63.37 per hour of contracted time. For teachers, the range is \$38.49-\$84.92 per hour, and classified employees earn \$11.33-\$45.52 per hour.

Superintendent Bryon Schaefer, the highest paid district employee, makes \$127 per hour and also worked 28 years in the district before becoming superintendent.

"We all are aware of the innumerable hours and days all of these employees work outside of their contracted time to provide our students with the best educational experience possible," Zulfa said. "To consider this additional time would further decrease the hourly wage for all of these employees."

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KHSD teachers earn less than employees in many smaller school districts, including Taft Union High, where teachers made \$79,713 on average in 2013, according to the state.

KHSD's full-time teachers earned about \$1,500 less than teachers averaged statewide in 2013, according to a database the state compiles.

Teachers made \$67,906 on average in KHSD compared to \$69,435 statewide in 2013.

Union leaders say the pay disparity deters prospective teachers from coming to KHSD and current district teachers from staying put.

Vickie Shoenhair, president of the Kern High School Teachers Association, has been teaching in KHSD for more than 40 years. She said her base salary still has not reached \$100,000.

Shoenhair's salary increased from \$93,461 in 2013-2014 to \$98,181 this year, she said.

"In the private sector that would be almost unheard of," she said. Even with the 5 percent raise, KHSD's salary schedule is still not very competitive, Shoenhair said, because other districts implemented raises, too.

In Kern County alone, more than two dozen districts issued raises for educators last school year.

The Norris School District, which receives the lowest amount of per-pupil funding from the state in Kern County, approved a 3 percent raise last school year and another 6 percent one Wednesday.

The change brings the median salary for certificated staff from \$57,685 to \$61,146 beginning Dec. 1. Average salary will increase from \$59,769 to \$63,355.

The median pay of KHSD teachers will only be \$43 more than that of Norris teachers.

And even though state Controller John Chiang's reports show KHSD employees on average earned about \$4,000 more than K-12 workers in hundreds of California districts last year, KHSD teachers make significantly less than top administrators in the district. They pull in between \$154,000 and \$225,000.

Lisa Krch, a spokeswoman for the district, wrote in an email that administrators work 240 days a year. Teachers work 184 days, so the pay difference makes sense, she said.

"Our administrative salaries are comparable with other districts of similar size in California and the responsibilities that go with running the largest 9-12 school district in the state," Krch added.

It's estimated approximately 90 percent of the KHSD budget is spent on salary and benefits for employees.

The 5 percent increase for educators alone will cost the district \$9.2 million.

Jesse Aguilar, chairman of the Kern High School Teachers Association's bargaining committee, said teacher pay is a problem not only locally but nationally.

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"It's a value statement almost. What do we value in our society?" he asked. "We're willing to allow certain professions to make tons of money, hands over fist."

Aguilar said he earned \$76,098 last school year and is due \$78,752 this school year.

He's taught for just fewer than 20 years.

The average pay for high school teachers nationally was \$57,243 in 2013, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Countries with better-performing schools such as Singapore and Finland also pay their teachers well, Aguilar said.

The Center on International Education Benchmarking says teachers' salaries in Singapore are "largely commensurate" with other fields. The country also recruits teachers from the top third of high school graduates.

In turn, students in Singapore scored highest in the Programme for International Student Assessment in problem solving, according to a report released in April.

Students in the United States performed slightly above average in problem solving, and more than one in six students tested didn't reach the baseline level of proficiency in the area.

Aguilar boiled the disparity down to value in education and in educators.

"I think here teachers are not valued," he said. Salary is one indication that, he added.

The Jackson Sun

Unnoticed deaths: Inmate suicides undocumented, rarely reported at local or state level

By Lauren Foreman lforeman@jacksonsun.com

Suicide is the leading cause of death in jails nationwide, with the highest suicide rates in small jails. But a review by The Jackson Sun shows that inmate suicides in West Tennessee jails are largely undocumented and are not reported at the state level.

The federal government does not set a national standard for supervising inmates who show signs of being a high risk to commit suicide. State guidelines are not specific, and practices vary widely among counties in Tennessee.

The Jackson Sun attempted to document instances of suicides in a number of West Tennessee jails but found no record-keeping systems that allow for the public to review accounts of inmate suicides. Some sheriff's officials simply rely on memory to recall suicides in their jails.

Michele Deitch, a prison policy expert and professor at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs in Austin, Texas, said public accountability and transparency in jails is a wide-ranging problem.

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"I think the public has a right to demand that there be reports, publicly accessible reports," Deitch said.

The Jackson Sun's review of inmate suicides and jail regulations regarding inmates on suicide watch follows the suicide of Jonathan Lee Carter in December in the Madison County Jail. Logs examined by the newspaper showed that jailers did not follow policy in properly monitoring Carter, who was in an isolation cell on suicide watch when he died. Questions were also raised about the sprinkler system Carter hanged himself from and why it did not have a break-away sprinkler head.

Harrell Carter, president of the local branch of the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People, said Jonathan Lee Carter's death could have been prevented.

"I think that any time that you have a prisoner in custody, it's a responsibility of the agency to protect them," Harrell Carter said. "That's number one."

He said Jonathan Lee Carter should not have been able to access the sprinkler system in the ceiling of his cell.

"That's the whole problem," Harrell Carter said. "If shortcuts were taken, then that's on us as a county."

Limited findings

Some West Tennessee county sheriffs told The Jackson Sun they would not access inmate suicide numbers because they did not have the time to look up data, or did not respond to the requests for information. Others said they could not access data before 2010 because they could not determine the names of inmates who killed themselves or other necessary information about the inmates, and many relied on memory of jail employees.

Written public information requests have been sent to Hardeman and Carroll counties seeking more complete inmate suicide histories.

Carroll County Sheriff Andy Dickson said that accessing inmate suicide information is not a priority of his administration.

"I've got more important things to do with my time than to look up things for you," Dickson said to a reporter.

He said he did not know who would have access to inmate suicide records but that he could remember one suicide by hanging that occurred in Carroll County. Dickson would not release any other details because he said he was not familiar with the incident.

Rick Hollow, general counsel for the Tennessee Press Association, said statistical information about deaths in jails is public information but that the only option against a jail that will not release the information is to file a lawsuit.

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National prison policy experts question the effectiveness of suicide-prevention policies in the absence of accurately reported inmate suicide histories at jails.

"I would think that in order for a jail to come up with policies and procedures, it would really help them to understand the scope of their problem," Deitch said.

She said she doesn't understand how jails can do that without knowing how many inmate suicides happen, how they happen, in what settings and at what times of day, among other things.

She said another important factor is how officials define suicides versus attempted suicides or other deaths.

"How those deaths are classified really matters, and you may not be getting an accurate portrayal," Deitch said.

Lindsay Hayes, a national expert on suicide prevention in jails, is project director for the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives, which provides training on how to prevent inmate suicides.

In a 2010 study, the National Study of Jail Suicide: 20 Years Later, he asserts that suicide continues to be a leading cause of death in jails across the nation despite federal reports

that suicide rates in jails dropped between 2001 and 2007.

Hayes said he submitted requests to county jails throughout the nation for his study but that they were voluntary requests.

He said he does not know why counties can decide whether to withhold or release public information. It is a question of priorities for county jail officials, Hayes said.

Because jails are public institutions funded with taxpayer money, Hayes said, they need to be held accountable.

Benton, Chester, Decatur, Gibson, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson and Weakley county sheriffs and jail administrators say they have not had a suicide in their jails in the last 10 years.

McNairy County Sheriff Guy Buck said the county jail has not had a death by suicide in the past 10 years, according to what he was able to find in the records and employee's memories. The jail had one suicide in the 1990s that officials could remember.

Madison County Sheriff David Woolfork said Jonathan Lee Carter's suicide at his jail is one of four reported in the Madison County Jail over the past 10 years.

Michael George Fullington hanged himself in the Madison County jail on Dec. 23, 2003, after writing four suicide letters, according to jail reports.

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"Mr. Fullington had marks indicating that something had been tied around his neck; strips of what appeared to be bedsheets were tied in a loop from the top bunk," an officer said in a report.

Fullington, who was not on suicide watch, was in a cell by himself. Anthony Jonas Jackson hanged himself with a sheet in his isolation cell at the Madison County jail on March 25, 2004. Thomas Jerome Swinford hanged himself from the air vent of his cell Feb. 18, 2007, Woolfork said.

Swinford and Jackson were in isolation cells but not on suicide watch, Woolfork said.

Policy changes in the works

The Tennessee Sheriff's Association, Tennessee Corrections Institute and the University of Tennessee County Technical Assistance Service formed a jail oversight committee in October with other organizations to better combine Tennessee Corrections Institute standards and American Correctional Association standards.

But the revisions, which would change minimum state standards that pertain to monitoring suicidal and other special-management inmates, are not part of a legislative process.

Officials have not released a complete list of proposed changes.

Jeff Long, president of the Tennessee Sheriff's Association, said revisions that the jail oversight committee establishes might include continued medical screening if indications of suicide exist, as well as a recommendation that suicidal inmates be observed at least every 15 minutes.

The Tennessee Corrections Institute provides minimum standards for local county jails in the state. Those standards can be accessed online at <http://www.tn.gov/sos/rules/1400/1400-01.pdf>.

"Unfortunately, they are very weak, and don't even address suicide prevention," said Hayes, the expert on suicide prevention in jails.

The state Corrections Institute standard requires jailers to observe all prisoners at least once every hour on an irregular schedule and observe suicidal inmates more frequently, logging all checks.

Long said the next step will be for jail administrators to review the proposed standards, send them back to the Corrections Institute for rule-making approval and send them through the state rule-making authority. The standards also state that incidents, including attempted suicides, that endanger the lives or physical welfare of custodial officers or prisoners shall

be recorded in a daily log and retained. National prison experts say many jails have opted into accreditation programs such as one operated by the American Correctional Association that works with jails to improve inmate protection practices, but participation is not mandatory and entails a fee.

Margaret Noonan, a U.S. Department of Justice statistician, said that between 2000 and 2009, suicides accounted for 29 percent of all jail deaths. Heart disease is a close second at 22 percent, she said.

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To compile national statistics about jails, she said, the Bureau of Justice Statistics sends forms to jails that request mortality numbers and causes of death of inmates.

Many smaller jails may have only recently started to keep track of inmate information electronically, Noonan said. Accessing inmate files may be more time consuming, and some jails may not have switched to electronic filing, she said.

The Tennessee Department of Correction reported 29 inmate suicides in state prisons between 2001 and 2011, said Communications Director Dorinda Carter. This does not include deaths in county jails.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics mortality data follows the Death in Custody Reporting Act of 2000, which required quarterly collection of individual death records for prison and jail fatalities.

Prior to the act, the bureau conducted annual counts of state prisoner deaths.

Counts of jail inmate deaths were collected in the Census of Jails, which is conducted every five or six years, said Christopher J. Mumola, a policy analyst, in a 2005 Bureau of Justice Statistics report on suicides and homicides in local jails and state prisons.

Noonan said the Bureau of Justice Statistics does not release inmate suicide numbers for individual jails, only combined statistics for the national level.

Peter Wagner, executive director of the Prison Policy Initiative, said jails report many inaccuracies to data collection agencies, which might also explain why Bureau of Justice statisticians do not report local statistics.

He said statistical conclusions about individual jails are rare because they can be misleading.

"Is one suicide a trend?" Wagner said. Jails opt for more visible suicide watch cells

With minimal state and national standards, West Tennessee counties have a variety of practices related to suicidal inmates that include the location of suicide watch and isolation cells in more public work areas, more frequent checks on special-management inmates and camera monitoring systems.

Madison County sheriff's officials changed jail policy and implemented plans already in the works about a month after Jonathan Lee Carter, 24, hanged himself while on suicide watch.

Four deputies were suspended, and one resigned after jail logs revealed that deputies made their last check more than two hours and 20 minutes before Carter was found hanging in his cell. State standards require checks occur at least once every hour on an irregular schedule and more frequently in the case of suicidal inmates.

Madison County supervision and management policy states that special-management inmates, including those who are suicidal, be checked at least every 15 minutes or more often as necessary.

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Madison County sheriff's officials implemented a refined policy that include checks on suicide-watch inmates every 10 to 15 minutes, an audited

scanning system to better track which deputies make inmate checks, a supervisory check every hour to ensure procedure is followed appropriately and a new inmate camera monitoring system in four designated cells for booking and central-control workers.

In Chester County, the suicide watch cell is housed underneath the jail's control room, which is staffed at all times. A glass window atop the cell allows control room officers to monitor suicidal inmates.

Chester County Sheriff Blair Weaver said he has never had a suicide in his jail.
Crockett County Sheriff Troy Klyce said he also opted for a more public cell for inmates

on suicide watch.

He said jail administrators changed procedure after an inmate, Tim Plunk, hanged himself from a sprinkler head in an isolation cell in 2001. He was not on suicide watch.

In 2004, Mike Ellington committed suicide in the Crockett County jail when a jailer placed a bottle of pills in front of Ellington while planning to give him medicine.

Ellington swallowed the contents of the bottle and died after being taken to the hospital in Humboldt. The jailer, who had worked at the jail several years, resigned after the suicide.

Most new inmates are first housed in isolation before they are given permanent cell assignments because jail workers need to make sure they do not put them in a population where problems could arise, Klyce said.

"It's not unusual," he said. "Just about always if you come to jail here, you're going to isolation first." Plunk was jailed on assault and arson charges involving his wife following a stint in prison for armed robbery.

Klyce said Plunk climbed on a commode and used a sheet to hang himself by

wrapping it around part of the sprinkler system. "There was no warning on that," Klyce said.

Klyce said jailers have improved the monitoring of isolation cells since the suicides.

Current policy requires officials to make rounds every hour. A jailer is in the isolation area at all times, Klyce said.

"That way they're in sight," he said. "They can hear everything going on in there."

Klyce said jailers will occasionally place suicide watch inmates in a visitation room with cameras.

Arrest in Reagan homicide: Family talks about 17-year-old suspect and loss of husband, father, role model

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Written by Lauren Foreman

MILAN — Trena Reagan was planning a family vacation Thursday afternoon when one of her co-workers called and said her husband Charlie Reagan's business was sectioned off with crime tape and surrounded by police cars and ambulances.

Trena hurried from her house to Supreme Muffler and Brakes, around the corner at Van Hook and Highland streets. Officers stopped her at the tape that blocked the front entrance to the shop.

Police Chief Tim Wright told Trena, Charlie's wife of 30 years, that her husband had been taken to Milan General Hospital after he was stabbed several times in the chest and abdomen. She rushed to the hospital, where she works as a nurse, but was not allowed to help with efforts to resuscitate her husband, she said.

She sat at the nurses station, watching the numbers on her husband's monitor and knowing what they meant.

"It's just unbelievable," Trena Reagan said on Friday. "He's such a fighter, but I knew when they said he had been stabbed multiple times ..." She paused as her voice cracked, and the tears that had welled up in her eyes dropped down her cheeks. "I just knew that there was no way he could make it."

Early Friday morning, police arrested a 17-year-old and charged him with first-degree murder and especially aggravated robbery in Reagan's death. Prosecutors will seek to have him tried as an adult, Wright said.

Trena Reagan said Friday that police told the family the suspect they arrested is Victor Thompson.

Trena said Thompson used to attend Milan High School with the couple's 16-year-old daughter, Sara Reagan.

In an interview Friday, Wright would not confirm the suspect's name but said the suspect had done some work for Charlie Reagan in the past.

"We have some physical evidence that would link the suspect to the scene and to the crime," Wright said.

That evidence includes the murder weapon, a kitchen knife with a long, slender blade, he said. Wright said investigators found the knife near a house on Cedar Street.

Police received tips that helped them identify the suspect about 9 p.m. Thursday. They found the teen in the parking lot of the Milan Wal-Mart about 12:30 a.m. Friday and took him into custody, Wright said.

Authorities suspect robbery was the motive for the killing.

Wright said Reagan was known for sometimes carrying a lot of money. He arrived at the hospital Thursday with only change in his pockets. His wallet was missing when a customer found him slumped over a hydraulic lift in the work bay of his muffler shop about 2:50 p.m. Reagan asked the customer to call for help.

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Milan community members said Friday they could not understand the crime because of Reagan's generosity and compassion.

"Chances are, whoever did this, if he just asked him for the money, he would've given it to him," said Courtney Anderson, manager of Sparkle Cleaners. She manned the small shop at 15423 S. First St., just yards away from the Wal-Mart parking lot where police made the arrest.

Reagan's wife, three daughters and sister-in-law sat around their dining room table Friday retelling his favorite jokes, their driveway filled with 13 cars.

"Did you know where the box was?" "Have you seen Joe?" they mimicked, trying to remember the punch lines.

The Reagans' daughters — Hannah Reagan, 10, Sara Reagan, 16, and Christen Ferrell, 27 — came in and out of the dining room, mingling with guests and tending to their mother, telling stories their dad had told dozens of times.

One of his favorites was about Ferrell's husband, Ched Ferrell, throwing the winning pass in a 1997 Milan football game.

"It was the last seven seconds of the ball game, and the score was tied," Christen Ferrell said. "And he threw the winning touchdown pass in the last seven seconds."

Charlie Reagan was an avid Milan High School sports fan and athlete, and most of the community knew his face as a marathon runner who waved his purple flag to lead the Bulldogs football team in at each game.

Flowers marked the entrance of Reagan's store, where the Bulldogs cheerleaders showed their support for him Friday.

A bouquet of sunflowers wrapped in newspaper clippings about Reagan adorned a chair in front of the shop door. The words "Gone but never forgotten" were etched on a bundle of about 11 purple and silver balloons. The words reappeared on a purple looped ribbon that many members of the community displayed as their Facebook profile pictures, with "How 'bout them Bulldogs" in the background of the image.

Tears in Trenia Reagan's eyes welled as she showed pictures of the phrase and explained that a photographer was ordering T-shirts in her husband's honor.

The family also began making funeral plans. State Sen. Roy Herron, a friend of Charlie Reagan's for more than 40 years, called Friday morning and asked Trenia if he could speak at the funeral, scheduled for next week. Trenia said she made room in the program for her husband's longtime friend and running buddy.

Herron said he attended elementary, middle and high school in Dresden with Charlie Reagan and his siblings.

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"I don't think I've ever met a more determined and persevering individual," Herron said.

Taran Coleman, a 17-year-old Bulldogs football player, came to the Reagan home Friday with two classmates. He slipped folded bills into one of Trena's closed hands. Braxton Simpson, 17, stood nearby. The two had begun collecting donations to contribute to funeral costs for the family. Emily Hawkins, another Milan student, made the first donation.

"We understood that it's hard for the family trying to raise money for this," Coleman said. The two boys wrapped their arms around Trena, who cried as she thanked them.

Trena said the community's outpouring of support amazed her, and it started Thursday afternoon when she said the hospital staff worked tirelessly to resuscitate Charlie.

"He arrived at 3:17," she said. They did not pronounce him dead until 4:47 p.m. "They worked so hard — so hard — to save him. And I know it was just because he was mine."

— Lauren Foreman, 425-9763