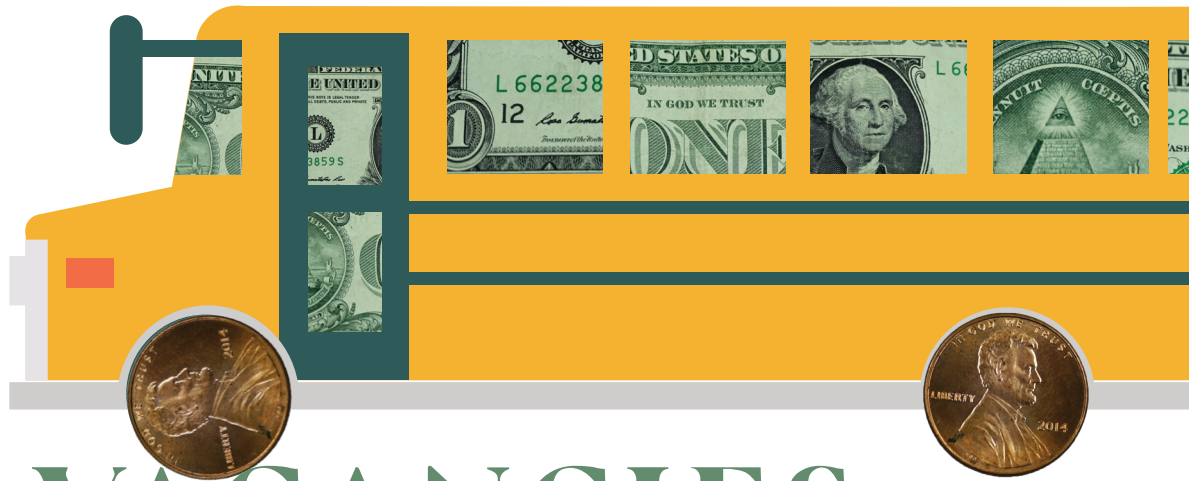


Vacant East jobs as of November 8

- EAST'S SEARCH**
- **baseball asst. coach**
 - **boys swim asst. coach**
 - **boys basketball coach**
 - **softball asst. coach**
 - **building manager**
 - **paraprofessional**



VAST VACANCIES

SMSD has been facing a staffing shortage specifically in the areas of the bus system, substitute teachers and the janitorial staff, and administration is working to eliminate these vacancies

by peyton moore

Nine lunch service employees feeding students for five different lunch periods. Three custodians taking care of five different floors. Buses transporting six sporting teams. While students ease back into a mostly normal school year, our staff still suffers the repercussions of the pandemic.

With the sudden labor shortage, the Shawnee Mission School District's applicant pool has shrunk tremendously. As of Oct. 11, the district reported 54

SCAN ME • APPLICATION



Scan here to visit Applitrack, SMSD's job searching and application website

paraprofessional vacancies, 26 food service job opportunities and about 50 custodian vacancies throughout SMSD schools — which is almost two thirds more than the vacancy count in 2019.

Associate principals Dr. Susan Leonard and Jeff Storey are hoping for applicants on SMSD's hiring site, Applitrack. In previous years, Storey was used to sorting through 10 applicants for the recent paraprofessional vacancy. Now, he feels lucky to even have a single applicant.

Along with businesses across the nation, SMSD is struggling to find employees for nearly every field. However, the hardest to find are classified employees, who work jobs that don't require a professional education for the role such as paraprofessionals, custodians, lunch service employees, substitute teachers and bus drivers.

Though filling these vacancies has never been an extreme challenge for SMSD, the supply just isn't matching the demand

according to Jarius Jones, Director of Classified Human Resources for SMSD.

"We want our employees to know they are valued because they work so hard every single day," Jones said. "We want to make sure that our scholars have all of the resources they need to flourish. We as a district recognize our staff and students and want to provide for them and are working towards staying competitive in this realm."

With the understaffing at SMSD, the current employees are having to do double the work, leaving them with little room for flexibility, according to Leonard. Custodians work every day with two less sets of hands than normal, lunch staff has to work four separate jobs in the kitchen just to get the food out in time, bus drivers are called in 15 minutes before an assignment and students are often left wondering why their teacher's gone and where the substitute is five minutes after the bell rings.

One way the East administration is considering dealing with these changes is having "working detentions" for students. Instead of having traditional detentions, Leonard has started the conversation of giving students "working detentions" — detentions spent helping out with approved tasks around school. Recent actions for these detentions that have been approved include emptying trash cans, mopping and wiping down the lunch room.

"I like restorative justice practices because it makes you feel better after making a mistake to do something good," Leonard said. "But also this is the time, especially for our custodians who are working two men down. Why not have students help out instead of sitting through a detention?"

Even with COVID-19, it's still a mystery

as to why the staffing shortage is so apparent this year, according to Jones.

"We simply don't know," Jones said. "That right there is the million-dollar question. And every business is trying to give this a million-dollar answer but we just don't know. It's coincided with COVID-19, but slowly people are getting back to work and still there are openings."

A large amount of frustrations have arisen as these classified employees work the job of two or three people for a single salary, according to Jones.

But these conditions may be changing.

The school board has released public statements about potentially raising the minimum pay for classified workers, arguing that businesses, neighboring school districts and local businesses have to raise their pay at or above \$15 to keep their doors open.

With the conversation rolling, Jones estimates the board will propose an increase

WE WANT OUR employees to know they are valued because they work so hard every single day. We want to make sure that our scholars have all of the resources they need to flourish.

**JARIUS JONES • SMSD
DIRECTOR OF CLASSIFIED
HUMAN RESOURCES**

in the minimum pay of classified workers as early as this spring.

Until then, SMSD has searched for employees in almost every field. The district hosted a job fair on Aug. 4 in hopes of filling some of the vacancies, specifically in the

classified positions. Although potential employees were found and later hired, it didn't come close to filling all of the vacancies for this school year, according to Jones.

After this semi-success, the district continues to attend other job fairs, promote vacancies on social media and encourage building leaders to announce job opportunities to parents who might help out or work in the field in their weekly newsletter.

East parent Bob Blacketer took on the position as a substitute teacher last winter after hearing about the lack of substitutes due to the pandemic — a possibility made by the flexibility his full-time job provides. He trained for eight hours total with both the Teacher Education of Kansas and Kelly Services, SMSD's contact for substitutes. During the 2020-21 school year, Blacketer filled in whenever needed.

"Because I wasn't traveling for work, I decided to be active and to volunteer or help the community," Blacketer said. "And to also be a good example for my kids on how to support your community."

At the end of the year, Blacketer donated all of his earnings from substitute teaching to the East Fund. But not stopping there, Blacketer is currently undergoing training to become a "bus sub" for DS Bus Lines — East's outsourced bussing.

The district is providing maximum effort, including hiring applicants any time they can, according to Jones. But part of the problem is out of their control. No one knows the answer to this national "million-dollar question."

"I want everyone to know that we are still hiring," Jones says.