

## Riverside USD Brings On the Barbecue

*Child Nutrition Director Rodney Taylor adds a daily BBQ to his program's successful strategies*



**“What wouldn't you do for your kids?”** Any parent would respond unequivocally that there is no length too great to go to for their children. Rodney Taylor, Nutrition Services Director for Riverside Unified School District (RUSD), applies that approach to his summer meal program.

RUSD's overall food service program has grown to a \$17 million budget with a staff of more than 350 employees. The growth and success of RUSD's program are a true reflection of Taylor's commitment to kids and his vision of a summer meal program that does more than serve food. It also reflects the belief that student nutrition is an integral part of the education process and the community itself.

Just a few of the positive changes he's brought to RUSD include:

- **BBQ in the Park** – RUSD partnered with Riverside Parks, Recreation and Community Services to bring meal service to city parks in target areas. What started as serving 141,000 meals in eight parks expanded to nearly 300,000 meals in 24 parks in Summer 2011. Bringing barbecue to the parks was highly successful in part because, as something RUSD already offered in its junior and senior high schools, it provided the kids several different options, allowing them to choose something different each day. And when do barbecue and summer not go together?



- **Expanded Service Brings More Jobs** – As RUSD focused on growing its summer program, it provided jobs for an estimated 200 employees who otherwise would not have been working over the summer. Mr. Taylor cites an aggressive approach and taking challenges head-on as the reason for its growth. As demand for free and reduced-price lunches rose during the school year due to the recession, RUSD's summer meal program also expanded from serving 47% to 70% of Riverside's kids in need.
- **Farmers Market Salad Bar** – In 2005, Taylor had an idea to bring a healthy alternative to the standard school lunch by developing a now nationally recognized salad bar program. RUSD brings the principles of providing farm-fresh, colorful fruits and vegetables to its summer meal services, through partners like Power Play. These efforts are guided by the idea that providers should offer food choices that are both appealing and user-friendly.

Mr. Taylor takes a very practical approach to building a good food service program. His advice? Don't feed whole apples to a group of elementary school kids who have just lost their front teeth. Mr. Taylor credits partnerships and collaboration as a huge reason for RUSD's success. His tireless efforts have earned him awards on a local and national level, but this humble gentleman is just happy to do something that he loves, knowing that he is making a difference in kids' lives.