



For a society that is so obsessed with appearances, we don't pay enough attention to the food we put in our mouths, or to the fact that many others out there don't have anything to put in theirs.

According to a series of government reports released in late November, more than 17 million children did not consistently get enough food to eat in 2008. Many of those who did inevitably ate the wrong foods, contributing to a rising obesity rate that represents a looming health and fiscal crisis if something is not done to stop it.

And, to no one's surprise, the states with the largest percentage of low-income residents also have some of the highest obesity rates.

These reports came to our attention as we put the finishing touches on our January cover package, led by Senior Editor Naomi Dillon's "Breakfast for All." As Naomi notes in her story, families are less likely than ever to have breakfast together, and children are heading to school without the opportunity for the most important meal of the day.

The lack of time and attention we pay to how we fuel our bodies is not a new phenomenon. Obesity rates have been climbing steadily for the past decade, and we have written a number of stories on the problems schools face in dealing with students who are over-

weight and out of shape.

As Naomi's story notes, the notion of universal breakfast—in which all students get something to eat in the morning regardless of income level—is gaining traction in a number of districts. But as school leaders know all too well, it comes down to money, and in times of tough budget cuts, the extras are increasingly hard to find.

But consider this: 49 million people did not get enough food to eat last year, and 5.2 million children went days without eating, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And that does not take into account the numbers that ate unhealthy junk food at least in part because it is cheaper than the more nutritional items.

Without question, we're facing a huge crisis in this country that we can ill afford to ignore, even as Congress continues its ongoing debate over health care legislation. According to America's Health Rankings, a report published by the American Public Health Association and the Partnership Prevention, obesity could cost the U.S. about \$344 billion in medical-related expenses by 2018 if something is not done.

Simply put: Pay now, or pay later.

Until next month ...

Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief