

POLITICO Pro Q&A: Cynthia Osborne

By Bianca Quilantan

Cynthia Osborne, director of the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center and associate dean of the LBJ School at The University of Texas at Austin, spoke to your Weekly Education host about what early childhood education looks like for toddlers during the pandemic.

The center will release its “Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap” and [host a policy summit](#) on Tuesday.

This transcript has been edited for length and clarity

One of the main focuses in this pandemic has been getting K-12 students back to school. Are toddlers and infants being left out?

We focus on K-12 really at a high cost because we won't have a successful K-12 system if we don't have a successful child care system. Those things have to happen in parallel.

That's really what we find in this roadmap is that there isn't one institution or one system that will do it all. We can't rely on child care, we can't rely on our public schools, we can't just rely on our health systems or our employment economy. We really have to think about how all of these are so interconnected and that we really are not being as effective as we can be if we only just focus on one of those at a time.

Where are the infants and toddlers going during the pandemic?

Our infants and toddlers are predominantly in child care centers, and many of them are in family child care situations where someone in the neighborhood may take in three to six children, but they have much less support, regulation and oversight. I think that's going to be even more important as we're building out of the Covid crisis, because we know that family child care centers are places that parents are feeling much more comfortable with now.

Is this affordable, or are there any trends in how people pay or where they choose to go?

We know that higher income and higher educated parents are able to afford higher quality care. And so they will seek it out, but sometimes they also prefer to leave their children in family arrangements.

Child care subsidies or reimbursements are more likely to go to centers, than to family childcare. When lower income families are using subsidies to access care then they're more likely to be in centers. Child care subsidies are actually an effective tool to bring folks into centers that we hope are higher quality than home-based care.

But we also have a lot of lower income families who can't even afford the subsidies or don't work in a regular way so that they can use the center. And so they will prefer home-based care and sometimes an unregulated market where they're able to just leave their children with someone in their neighborhood who's available and who can really take care of their kids.