On Dec. 7, state leaders will have the opportunity to discuss the benefits of early childcare, and why states should invest in making early childhood education affordable for working families, at a CSG 2018 National Conference session titled Working Families and the Struggle to Find Early Care and Education.

Albert Wat, senior policy director at the Alliance for Early Success, provided CSG with valuable insight on this critical issue. According to Wat, the cost of and the lack of access to quality childcare and education are the biggest struggles families face. Wat called the search for childcare an equity issue among low-income families.

“Early education isn't like public school. It's not a right,” Wat said. “It becomes an access issue.”

The CSG Education and Workforce Development policy team want to highlight this issue for state officials because quality is the most important factor to consider when choosing a childcare or early education option.

The benefits of early childhood education extend to both the child as an individual but also state economies. For the child, an investment in early development programs results in better health, education, social behaviors and employment opportunities later in life. The programs have also shown to reduce the chances of obesity, depression and crime as young adults.

The return on a state’s investment is realized through better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors and employment. These outcomes contribute to the 13 percent per year return on an investment in birth-to-five years old childhood education, and help mitigate the growing rate of childhood poverty. As the childcare industry has grown, state and regional economies have experienced economic productivity and growth.

“It starts with well-trained educators,” said Wat.

Early childhood investment also contributes to workforce productivity in the long-run.

“To fulfill this workforce promise, we need to think of it as early education, not just early childcare,” Wat said when asked about the benefits society receives from an investment in its children. Instead of using childcare as a work support system so families can go to work, a focus on early education – including the subtle skills a child needs to communicate with their peers – builds skills that lead to productive workers the country needs.

State leaders who attend the “Working Families and the Struggle to Find Early Care and Education” session at the CSG’s National Conference will have the opportunity to learn more about organizations like the Alliance for Early Success and its program, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center, which works with state governments to improve childcare and early education.