

WV Tri-Share Case Study

# How West Virginia's Tri-Share Model is Closing the Child Care Gap—And Why Other States Should Pay Attention



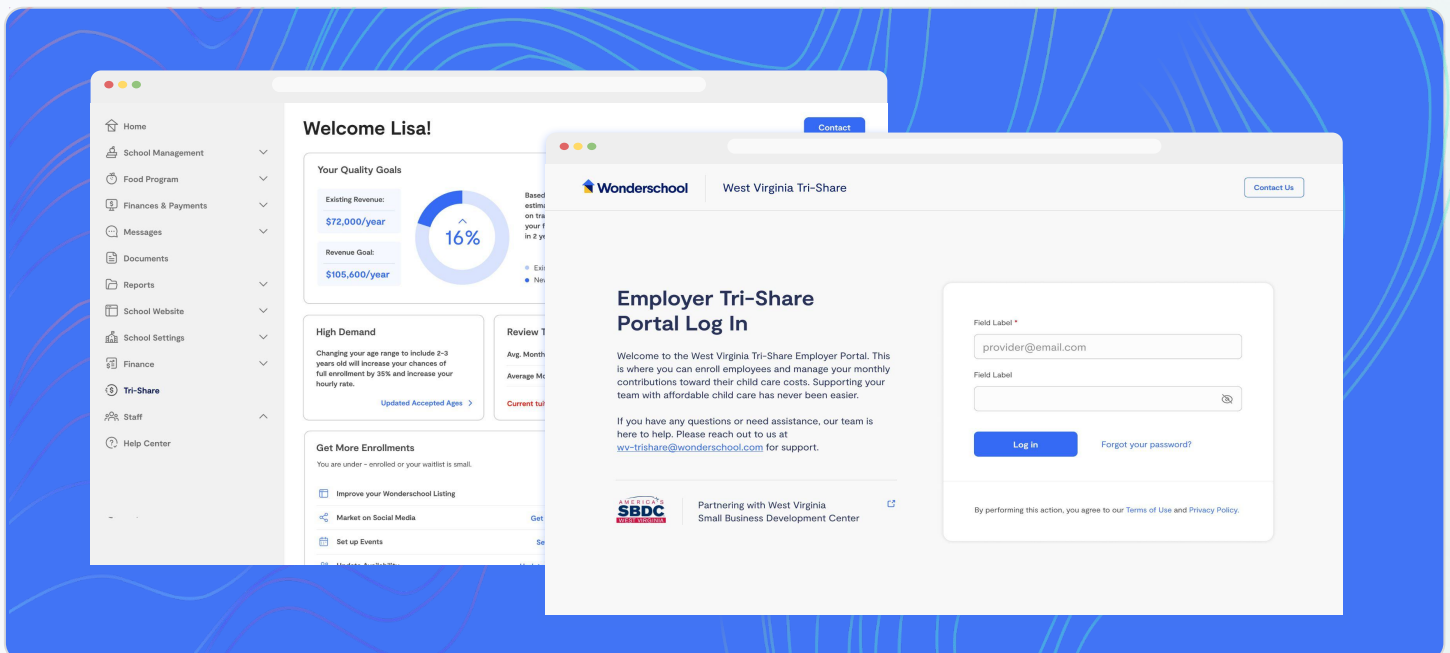
# Overview

West Virginia is caught in a difficult loop. The state's workforce participation ranks the lowest in the country, [hovering around 55 percent](#). One of the biggest reasons is child care. Nearly two-thirds of West Virginians [live in a child care desert](#), where reliable providers are unavailable.

A recent Wonderschool survey of 250 small and medium West Virginia business owners underscores the challenge. More than half said child care challenges frequently or very frequently affect their employees' ability to work. Just as many reported increased absenteeism or turnover tied directly to child care. Without dependable care, parents face the choice of staying home or leaving the workforce altogether. The state's economy feels the weight of that choice every day. At the same time, child care providers themselves are under strain, with rising costs, staffing shortages, razor-thin margins, and other challenges making it difficult to keep centers open, let alone expand.

Amid these overlapping challenges, a model has emerged that is proving to be a lifeline: Tri-Share. By splitting the cost of child care three ways—between the state, the employer, and the employee—Tri-Share reduces the financial burden on families, makes it easier for employers to keep good workers, and gives providers a more stable foundation to build on.

The model is proving successful in West Virginia, but it also has the potential to scale nationwide. States everywhere are grappling with the same intertwined challenges of low workforce participation, rising child care costs, and provider shortages. The early success of the Mountain State's pilot shows that Tri-Share is more than a local fix. It is a blueprint that can be adapted and expanded wherever families, businesses, and economies depend on reliable child care.





## Shared Solutions, Shared Success in West Virginia

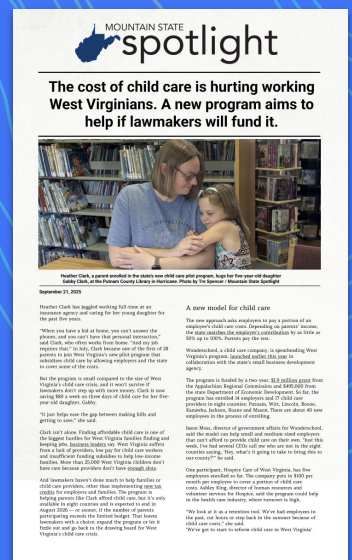
Earlier this year, West Virginia launched its Tri-Share pilot in eight coal-impacted counties: Boone, Jackson, Kanawha, Lincoln, Mason, Putnam, Roane, and Wirt. The state's health care sector has been hit especially hard by staffing shortages in recent years, so it's no surprise that some of the model's earliest adopters in the state are hospitals.

At Roane General Hospital, leaders realized that child care was a central issue affecting their ability to recruit and retain staff. They became one of the first major employers in the state to join the Tri-Share program. “You can’t have a conversation about keeping great people without talking about child care,” said Doug Bentz, the hospital’s CEO.

For Roane General, Tri-Share has meant that employees are not forced to choose between working and caring for their children. As CFO Amy Downey explained, the program translates into “hundreds, even thousands, of dollars back in our employees’ pockets.”

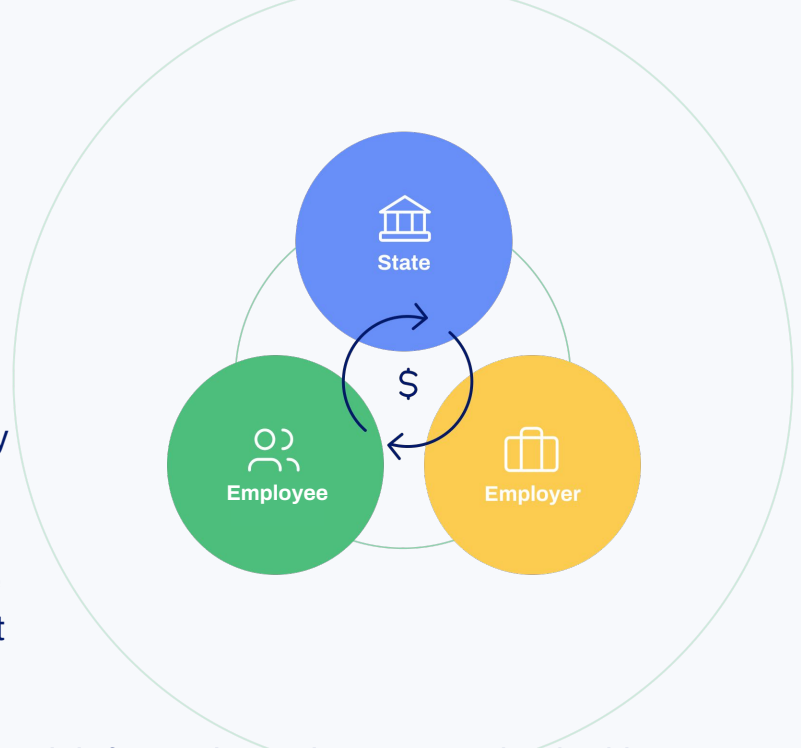
Roane General's success has rippled outward. Other employers across the state, from insurance agencies to schools, are beginning to sign on. Thomas Hospitals, Jackson General Hospital, Ellis Insurance, Scott Depot Christ Fellowship, Fort Hill Child Development Center, Mountaineer Montessori School, Auge+Gray+Drake, FamilyCare Health Centers, Milestones Physical Therapy, Early Education Station, HospiceCare, and Imagination Station are among those already participating.

Together, they show the program's versatility. Whether the employer is an insurance broker or a marketing agency, a large hospital or a small child care center, Tri-Share offers a practical way to retain good people in a tough labor market.



# How It Works

Employers who participate in the Tri-Share model agree to contribute toward child care costs for their staff. The State then pays a portion of the cost of care by matching the employer's contribution. Employees then pay the remaining balance, which can equate to thousands of dollars in annual savings for working families. Wonderschool provides the technology and administrative backbone that keeps the system running smoothly.



For families, getting started with Tri-Share is straightforward. Employees can check with their HR department to see if their employer participates in the program. Once enrolled, they can continue using their existing licensed provider or choose a new one from the Wonderschool platform. Wonderschool's system manages the split billing automatically, so parents pay only their reduced share. The state and employer contributions are routed directly to the provider, ensuring on-time, predictable payments every month.

For providers, the technology eliminates paperwork headaches. Wonderschool handles compliance requirements, financial disbursements, and reporting, while also offering tools to track enrollment and manage capacity. This infrastructure allows providers—many of them small businesses—to focus on what matters most: caring for children.

# Why It Works

There is a reason the model is catching on so quickly: it's a triple win. For employers, it is a powerful recruitment and retention tool that requires very little administrative work. For employees, it means access to a crucial resource, as well as the flexibility to choose their provider rather than being limited to a single center. For child care providers, it brings predictable revenue, stronger enrollment, and the ability to reach families who once saw care as out of reach.

# Why It Works

The momentum is beginning to build. Other states are showing what scaling can look like, moving from county pilots to [statewide adoption](#). Michigan, the first state in the country to launch Tri-Share in 2021, has grown its program to serve nearly 5,000 families. Kentucky launched a similar initiative that enrolled 35 employers and more than 130 children in its first six months. These early results suggest that West Virginia's pilot is not an isolated experiment, but part of a broader movement toward sustainable, shared child care solutions.

“Tri-Share has enabled businesses to overcome significant talent recruitment and retention challenges,” says Marcus Keech, who leads Wonderschool's Tri-Share Partnerships and who helped architect Michigan's first-in-the-nation Tri-Share program. “At a time when many workers are considering leaving the workforce due to child care barriers, this program helps businesses reengage with working parents and demonstrate that they are invested in their employee's wellbeing.”

## A Bipartisan Blueprint

Tri-Share represents more than just cost-sharing. It is an investment in working families, in rural economies, and in the providers who form the backbone of child care infrastructure. Wonderschool's technology strengthens that framework with powerful operational and administrative support. Beyond the tri-share functionality, providers can also use the platform to manage food program reimbursements and operate a full child care management system. Governments and agencies benefit as well. The platform's comprehensive data dashboards help leaders see where supply is lacking, where vacancies exist, and how resources can be better targeted.

For policymakers, the opportunity is clear. Programs like Tri-Share offer a scalable, statewide framework to ensure parents are not forced to choose between caring for their children and keeping their jobs. That makes a compelling case for securing funding through federal and regional channels—just as West Virginia did when it won an Appalachian Regional Commission POWER Grant to launch its pilot.

The solution is also as bipartisan as the issue it addresses. Whether red or blue, every state faces the challenge of child care gaps, and cost-sharing provides a practical answer that resonates across the aisle. By working together, providers, policymakers, and employers can close the child care gap and build a stronger foundation for the future.



# Learn more about West Virginia's Tri-Share Model

[Learn more](#)

This piece was written and produced by Wonderschool.

