

## FINANCIAL AID



**20** percentage points

Students in Bottom Line are 20 percentage points more likely to have had a meeting with someone to review their financial aid award letters.

## ENROLLMENT



**10** percentage points

Students in Bottom Line are 10 percentage points more likely to enroll at a four-year institution.

## PERSISTENCE



**10%**

Bottom Line students are 10 percent more likely to be continuously enrolled in college since high school than control group students.

## PERSISTENCE



**40%**

Bottom Line's program produces effects 40% larger in the second year of service than in the initial year of participation.

# The “Bottom Line” Effect

## What we're learning from our RCT

In 2014, Bottom Line decided to put our model to the most rigorous test: a randomized controlled trial (RCT). Researchers Andrew Barr (Texas A&M) and Ben Castleman (UVA) are tracking the results of two groups of students from the 2015 and 2016 graduating classes from Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts and New York City. One group was offered the opportunity to join Bottom Line as high school seniors and the other was not. The study is assessing Bottom Line's impact on college enrollment, persistence and, ultimately, college graduation. Below is a summary of the most recent assessment, detailed in [“The Bottom Line on College Counseling,”](#) published October 2017 and updated with the latest findings in January 2019.

**Researchers' Summary:** *“The Bottom Line model of advising students during high school and into college, combined with explicit guidance to students about applying to and attending institutions where they are likely to be successful without incurring substantial costs, leads to large effects on college enrollment and four-year college enrollment.”*

**Increasing Effectiveness:** In contrast to most interventions, Bottom Line's program effects grow over time, as the effects of treatment are even larger in the 2nd year after high school graduation than they are after the 1st. The offer of participation in Bottom Line results in an 8 percentage point increase in the likelihood of being enrolled and a 14 percentage point increase in the likelihood of being enrolled in a four-year college. **These effects are roughly 40 percent larger than the effects observed one year prior.**

**Consistency:** Program effects are **incredibly consistent across space, time, counselors, and student characteristics.** Impacts are quite consistent across student sub-groups, suggesting that the model has the potential to maintain its positive impact with diverse populations in numerous settings.

**Scalability:** Bottom Line generates similarly sized impacts across multiple program sites under local program leadership. Because the New York site had been in operation for only a few years prior to the RCT, large positive effects of the model there provide **direct evidence of scalability** and suggest that the program reaches maturity and efficacy more rapidly than many other programs.

**Unique Impact:** Bottom Line impacts are also positive for students who were already engaged with another college access organization at the time they started working with Bottom Line. Many of these organizations assist with FAFSA completion and provide application fee waivers, indicating that the **Bottom Line model adds value above and beyond such low-touch strategies.**

## Why is Bottom Line's model of college counseling so effective when so many other models produce limited or no enrollment effect, effects only for certain subgroups, or initial effects on college enrollment that fade or disappear entirely over time?

**Relationships:** In terms of students' responses about sources of college and financial aid advising, treatment students rate **Bottom Line's advising as the most important source of guidance**; 58 percent of treatment students indicated that Bottom Line advising was "very important" in their application and decision process. In contrast, only 21 percent of control group students indicated that "staff at other college access programs" were very important. Both groups ranked support from parents (~60 percent), counselors (~50 percent), and teachers (~30 percent) as very important.

**Shaping School Choice:** Bottom Line advisors appear to play a particularly important role in shaping school choice. While treated and control students were equally likely to apply to college and for financial aid, treatment students applied to significantly more colleges. Furthermore, **Bottom Line students were much more likely to discuss their financial aid award letter with someone and to consider costs in their decisions about where to enroll.** These effects are even more striking when one considers that 44 percent of the sample participated in an alternative counseling program, so were already getting some form of college and/or financial aid advising at the same time that they were engaged with Bottom Line.

**Financial Literacy:** Students in the treatment group were 10 percent more likely to rank costs as one of the top two factors in deciding where to attend. **They were also more confident that they would be able to afford college,** potentially a result of their much higher (20 percentage points) likelihood of meeting with someone to review their financial aid award letters.

**Leadership:** Over 90 percent of Bottom Line advisors generated positive postsecondary impacts for the students they served. From a scalability perspective this is highly important, since it suggests that **a combination of coherent organizational leadership, successful staff recruitment and training, and effective curriculum are driving the results we observe,** rather than a handful of particularly strong counselors who may be hard to identify and recruit in other contexts.

Bottom Line is dedicated to helping first-generation students from low-income backgrounds get into college, graduate, and go far in life. Our vision is to dramatically transform urban communities with thousands of new career-ready college graduates. As one of the first college support organizations to focus on college completion, we now operate in Massachusetts, where we were founded in 1997, New York City and Chicago. We currently serve almost 8,000 students. We plan to open two new sites and increase our footprint to 11,000 students by 2020.

### ADVISORS



# 90+%

29 out of the 30 Bottom Line Advisors involved in the study have a positive effect on four-year college enrollment

### IMPORTANCE



# 3x

Students receiving Bottom Line advising were three times more likely to consider staff very important to their application and decision process.

### SCALABILITY



# 50%

Back of the envelope calculations suggest that if the BL model were adopted broadly it would cut the income gap in four-year college enrollment in half.

### READ THE FULL REPORT



<http://bit.ly/BLRCTRPT>

Special thanks to the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation for supporting this RCT study.