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Bottom Line's Advising Program Significantly Improved College Graduation Rates in Randomized Control Trial

Boston, MA – November 4, 2021 – [Bottom Line](#), a nonprofit organization focused on educational equity and bachelor's degree attainment, is the focus of [new research findings](#) that indicate students are significantly more likely to obtain a bachelors degree when they receive Bottom Line advising.

Researchers Dr. Andrew Barr (Texas A&M) and Dr. Ben Castleman (University of Virginia) studied the outcomes of over 2,400 students from the 2015 and 2016 high school graduating classes from Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts, and New York City.

A rigorous, randomized control trial (RCT) with groups of this size studied since 2014 is rare, if not unprecedented, when combined with the statistically significant 8-point increase in five year college graduation rates. "An impact of this magnitude on bachelor's degree receipt has never been observed before in a well-conducted study of college prep programs, making Bottom Line the first to achieve this remarkable distinction," said Kim Casel, director of Evidence-Based Policy at [Arnold Ventures](#), one of the study's funders.

Bottom Line (BL) is a comprehensive one-on-one program that trains and employs full-time advisors who partner with degree-aspiring students. Students are eligible for the program if they have a high school grade point average of 2.5 or greater and come from families that make less than 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.

The relationships between students and advisors are at the core of the program, and the researchers found that Bottom Line's impacts are "consistent across time, advisor, and student characteristics."

Compared to the study's control group, Bottom Line students are:

- 13% more likely to be enrolled in a four-year college
- 17% more likely to be attend an institution with above-median earnings for graduates
- 2.8 times more likely to say that advising staff was "very important" to college decision-making process
- 23% more likely to graduate within four years after high school
- 16% more likely to graduate within five years after high school

"Bottom Line's intensive advising helps students build the skills and strengths needed to persist through life's challenges," said Sara Levy, Program Manager, College Preparation & Completion at the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. "The results of this study provide critical evidence of how Bottom Line's cost-effective model is making a difference for students. The Dell Foundation is proud to partner with Bottom Line to help more students unlock college opportunity."



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Bottom Line is privately funded and currently serves over 7,000 students. Its advisors continue working with students at no cost to their families, or their schools, for up to six years after high school graduation until the students complete bachelor's degrees and launch careers.

“What makes our program unique is this combination of authentic relationships with students built on trust and a real devotion to data-informed decision making,” said Bottom Line CEO Steven Colón. Founded in 1997, Bottom Line has continued to refine its advising program while collecting data on student outcomes from over 50 target colleges and the National Student Clearinghouse.

Another key finding drawn by Drs. Barr and Castleman from the data is that, “While the observed degree effects are quite consistent across different types of students, the fact that BL primarily serves students of color furthermore suggests that substantial expansion of the BL model could contribute to increased racial equity and mobility in the U.S.”

While the program is free to students, the average cost for Bottom Line to partner with students from high school through college graduation is \$4,000, leading the researchers to conclude that “the marginal degrees generated by BL appear to be larger per direct dollar spent than that of any large financial aid program that has been rigorously evaluated.”

About Bottom Line:

For nearly twenty-five years, Bottom Line has been fighting for educational equity by ensuring that the right to a quality college education is accessible to the many, not just the few. Our vision is to create a far-reaching ripple effect, launched by the transformative power of a college degree and a mobilizing first career. For degree-aspiring students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds, Bottom Line is a relentless ally who partners with them to get in, graduate, and go far.