



CELEBRATING **1,000** COLLEGE GRADUATES AND COUNTING

Bottom Line Chicago
2025-26 Impact Report

BOTTOM LINE

Get in. Graduate. Go far. Chicago.

ACCESS

Bottom Line's Access program equips high school seniors to research colleges that fit their individual criteria, submit competitive college and financial aid applications (including essays and FAFSA), and commit to the best fit college after acceptance. As they pursue bachelor's degrees that catalyze economic and social mobility, students strengthen the transferable skills, confidence, and decision-making capacity needed to navigate college, career pathways, and future opportunities.



Meet Billion W. He is a member of the graduating class of 2026 at Julian High School on Chicago's far south side. Julian High School is a place-based partner for Bottom Line. In addition to regular meetings at school, Billion also attended Bottom Line events such as the Empowering the Next Generation Men's Event and our winter social. He had a goal of majoring in architecture, and applied to nearly 20 colleges, well above the 12 that advisors usually recommend. His

Bottom Line advisor, James, was happy to help, but wasn't sure if Billion was competitive enough to receive financial aid at the kinds of colleges on his list. When it was time to review award letters, Billion was thrilled to learn that he was the recipient of a full-ride scholarship to the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), that even covered room and board. Billion is the only Julian student attending IIT this year, so the Bottom Line team connected him with a first-year student from our Success program who also attends IIT with the same full-ride scholarship.

Meet Abril P. She is one of the students who showed the most determination last year. At the start of her senior year at Gage Park, she was several months into a complicated pregnancy. She missed days of school and Bottom Line sessions due to doctor's appointments and bedrest and still managed to attend nine meetings and events with us, exceeding the average. Abril wanted to pursue four-year college options and a career in nursing. Today, she is getting ready to attend National-Louis University along with one of her best friends and fellow Bottom Line student, Jenara.



95%

College
Commitment Rate

247

Access students
will be attending

52

different colleges across

18

states this fall



1,626

meetings completed
this year. An average of

6.6 per student



95%

FAFSA
completion rate

SUCCESS

Bottom Line's Success program provides intensive 1:1 professional advising throughout students' first year of college, when persistence is most at risk, and continues personalized support in Years 2–6 through virtual advising, on demand 1:1 meetings, technology-enabled tools, and regional career programming that helps students build the networks, skills, and experiences needed to launch economically mobilizing first careers.

Through our **Degree, Employability, Affordability, and Life (DEAL)** framework, students receive support to stay on track academically, manage college costs, develop career readiness skills, and navigate personal challenges that may affect persistence.

Career readiness is embedded throughout the entire student experience. Through workshops, networking events, employer engagement opportunities, career exploration activities, and internship preparation, students build professional networks, strengthen workplace skills, and gain exposure to career pathways. Together, these services help students not only earn bachelor's degrees but also prepare for successful first careers and long-term economic mobility.



Nelly M. is a first-generation immigrant alumna who recently obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in neurobiology as an honors student from Dominican University. Her high school counselor introduced her to Bottom Line and she worked with her advisor to map out her entire college journey at Dominican. From then on, Nelly participated in regular meetings and took advantage of the resources available to her, carrying her farther than she ever imagined. She credits her advisors for teaching her invaluable life and career skills, including helping to secure emergency funds when she struggled to pay

out of pocket expenses. Through Bottom Line, Nelly identified scholarships and internship opportunities. At Bottom Line's 2026 Recognition Night, celebrating our 2026 college graduates, Nelly shared the following with her peers.

“Whatever challenges are thrown upon you, don't follow the crowds, don't listen to the whispers that doubt your strength, and don't ever forget where you came from. Your struggles shouldn't define you, but don't push them away either: embrace them and allow them to lead you to places that will stimulate your curiosity to not just learn more about your field of work, or about this world; let your curiosity expand to the ways you can contribute to this world and make a golden imprint on your community.”

1,308

Students Served

65%

students graduated from college in six years (2019-20 cohort)

Over 10 points higher than most recent CPS cohort (55.8%)



A total of

104

opportunities for students to gain hands-on experiences with employer partners



95%

students persisted into 2nd semester of college (2025-26 cohort)



91%

students persisted into 3rd semester of college (2025-26 cohort) vs. 77.6% nationally



OUR 1,000TH GRADUATE MEET ANGELES, CLASS OF 2026

When **Angeles G.** graduated from high school, she thought she had her future mapped out.

She was one of 35 students selected from more than 1,000 applicants to DePaul University's competitive nursing program. But as she progressed through her studies, she realized nursing was not the right fit. Determined to find a path that aligned with her passions, Angeles transferred to community college and began exploring other options. She earned an Associate Degree in Science and was later accepted into another highly competitive healthcare program. Again, she recognized that the career she had chosen was not where she saw herself long-term.

For many first-generation college students, career exploration can feel overwhelming. Growing up in a blue-collar family, Angeles had limited exposure to professional careers and corporate environments. Offices and corporate spaces felt distant and unrealistic because she rarely saw people who looked like her in those spaces.

That began to change through Bottom Line.

Programs like Go Far Forum and Career Insight Days introduced Angeles to industries and career paths she had never considered. Just as importantly, Bottom Line advisors remained a consistent source of guidance throughout every stage of her journey, helping her navigate uncertainty, identify opportunities, and build confidence in herself.

As she completed her associate degree, Angeles began exploring a field that had always intimidated her: computer science. For years, she had convinced herself that she was not smart enough to pursue it. But after everything she had already overcome, she realized computer science was not impossible to achieve.

So, while still scared, she went for it.

Although she entered the field with little experience, Angeles quickly immersed herself in learning and development opportunities and secured three internship offers, ultimately accepting one as a software engineer.

The experience was transformative, and it also brought moments of doubt.

Working alongside peers who had grown up around corporate and technology industries, Angeles often questioned whether she belonged. Many of her colleagues had family members in the profession and access to career guidance she never had. As a first-generation student and the only Latina in her internship cohort at a highly competitive trading firm, imposter syndrome often crept in.

Over time, she learned to recognize something important: she had earned her place there.

In spring 2026, Angeles earned her degree in Computer Science with a concentration in Software Development at DePaul University while also giving back to others through mentorship and leadership opportunities. She also serves as a Bottom Line Student Ambassador and a member of Bottom Line's National Student & Alumni Committee, helping other students navigate their own journeys.

As Angeles begins her career as a software engineer, she knows there are more obstacles ahead, and she also knows that she belongs in every room she enters.

And for the first-generation students who will follow in her footsteps, her story is a powerful reminder: sometimes the biggest obstacle is not a lack of ability but believing you don't belong. When students are given guidance, support, and opportunities to explore what is possible, they can achieve far more than they ever imagined.



At Bottom Line Chicago, we **STILL BELIEVE**. We still believe in our students and their futures. That is why we invite you to invest in the next 1,000 college graduates so that more young people can earn degrees, launch meaningful careers, and create a ripple effect in their communities.