



BOTTOM LINE'S IMPACT

Celebrating 10 Years in New York City

By Public Impact: Preston Faulk, Juli Kim, and David Gilmore



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Bottom Line's mission is to help first-generation students from low-income backgrounds get into college, graduate, and go far in life.

Public Impact's mission is to improve education dramatically for all students, especially low-income students, students of color, and other students whose needs historically have not been well met.

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Introduction

Thinking about college provokes a mix of excitement and angst for high school students. For many, applying to and attending college are a normal rite of passage. Everyone in their family attended college, or they attend schools where going to college is simply the step everyone takes after high school. These students benefit from the systems and structures around college access and persistence that were designed to privilege them. And they have had access to a disproportionate share of resources, resulting in a cycle that continues to benefit their communities.

But for many students in the U.S., particularly from low-income backgrounds, the idea of getting into college feels daunting and foreign. Given the national average of 430 students to a single school counselor, many students do not receive the individualized attention at school that they need for college preparation.¹ At home, they may not have family members who attended college in the U.S. nor close relationships with other college graduates to guide their application process. Finally, paying for college may seem unimaginable in the face of limited family resources.

Though higher education has long been a key driver of economic and social mobility, it was not historically designed for students from low-income backgrounds. Therefore, these students enroll in and graduate from college at significantly lower rates than more privileged peers.²

In 1997, Dave Borgal founded Bottom Line to help 25 seniors from Roxbury, Boston get accepted to college. After 14 years of growth, service, and program evolution in Massachusetts, Bottom Line expanded to New York City. Since 2011, beginning with its inaugural class of 121 high school seniors and 22 first-year college students, Bottom Line has helped thousands of first-generation New York City students from low-income backgrounds get into college, persist in college, and earn their degrees.

To commemorate the 10 years that Bottom Line has supported New York City students from underserved communities, this report examines the impact the nonprofit has had on its participants and their communities.

THE BOTTOM LINE ON ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Bottom Line’s signature programs have helped more than 18,000 students from Boston, New York City, and Chicago get into and succeed in college.

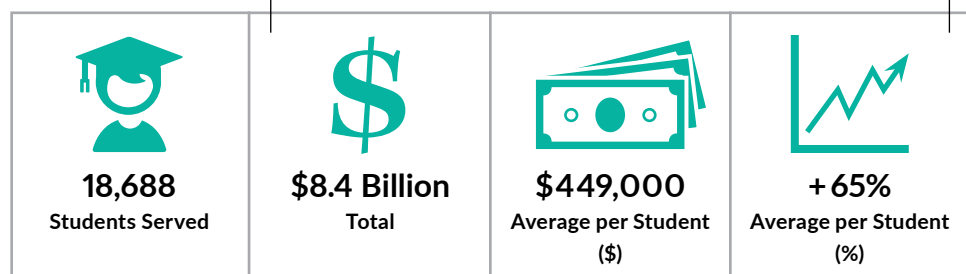
The *Access* program supports and guides high school seniors to make smart decisions about college selection, application, and financing.

The *Success* program supports college students, many of whom previously completed the *Access* program, to persist in college, graduate, and begin their careers.

(For more details about the *Access* and *Success* programs, see pages 8-9.)

Bottom Line’s Impact on Students

Additional Expected Lifetime Earnings





Bottom Line’s Impact

Since 1997, Bottom Line has served more than 18,000 students in Boston, New York City, and Chicago (see Figure 1, page 6) through the *Access* program, which helps high school students get into college, and the *Success* program, which supports college students to earn their degrees and start their careers (see “*Access and Success*” on page 8). About 90 percent of *Access* participants committed to enroll in either a two-year community college or a four-year university, surpassing the most recently reported national average college-going rate of 69 percent³ (see Figure 2, page 6). Three-quarters of *Success* participants completed at least a bachelor’s degree within six years, surpassing the most recently available national bachelor’s degree six-year graduation rate of 62 percent⁴ (see Figure 3, page 7). Moreover, Bottom Line’s programs have particularly affected students from historically marginalized groups (see sidebar on page 6 and “*Increased Access for Historically Marginalized Groups*” on page 10).⁵

Bottom Line makes a **particularly powerful impact on Black/African American and Latinx/Hispanic participants**. Black/African American students who participate in Bottom’s Line’s *Success* program graduate at a rate that is **more than 30 percentage points higher** than the national average; Latinx/Hispanic *Success* participants graduate at a rate **more than 10 percentage points higher**.

Figure 1
Cumulative Number of Students Served Through Bottom Line Over Time, 1997-98 to 2019-20

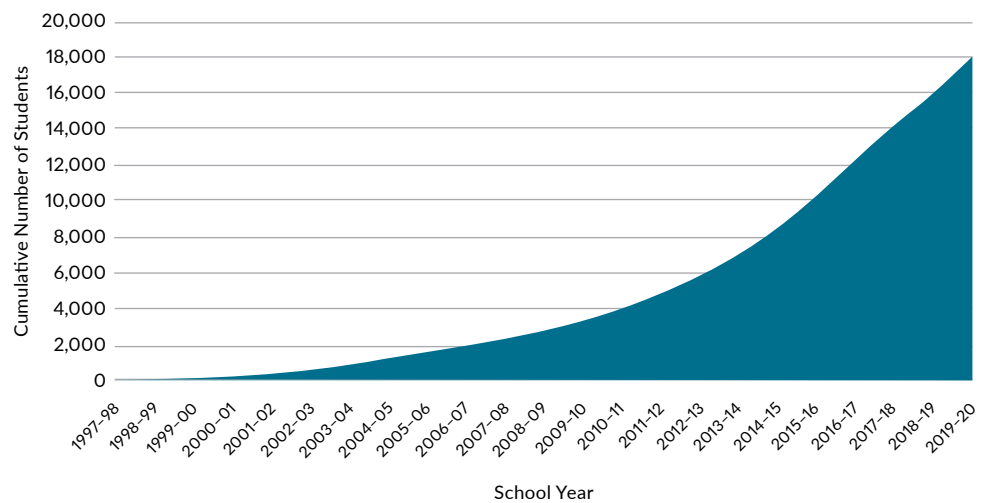
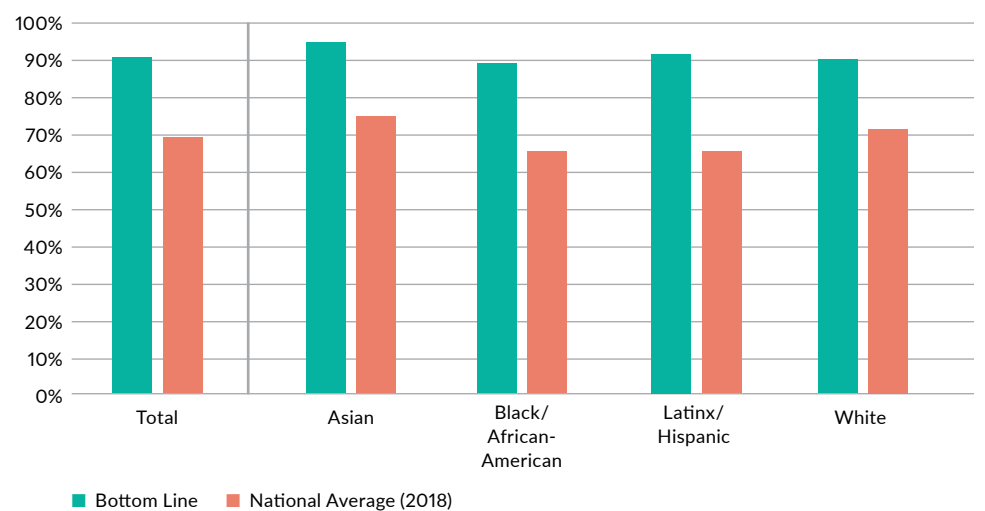


Figure 2
Immediate College Enrollment Rate,* Access Participants vs. National Average



*Note: Immediate college enrollment rate is defined as the annual percentage of high school completers who are enrolled in two- or four-year institutions in the October immediately following high school completion.

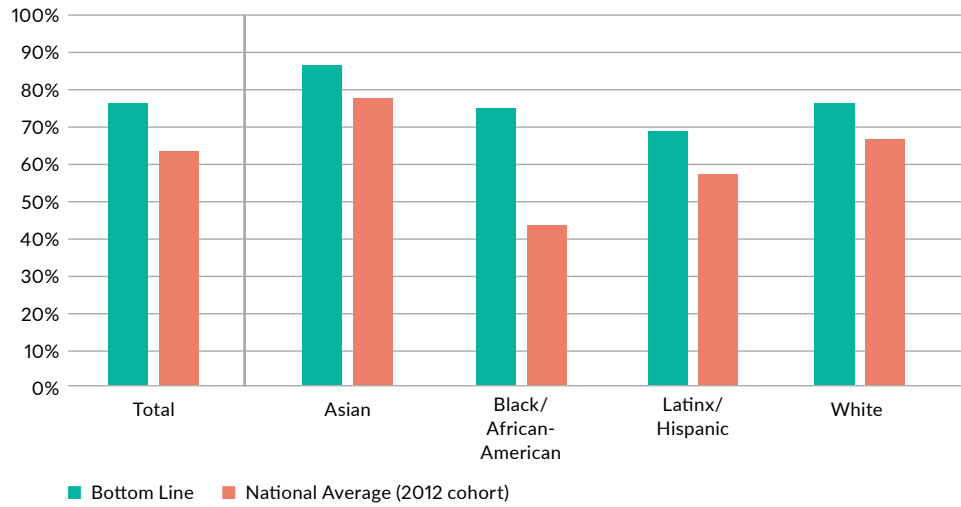


Figure 3
Six-Year Bachelor's Degree Graduation Rate, Success Participants vs. National Average





Access and Success

Bottom Line first connects with students at a critical time in their lives, near the end of high school, when the many support systems they may have had access to start to fade away. Predicated on the power of one-on-one relationships and data-driven advising, Bottom Line works with students who are in the first generation in their families to attend college in the United States, and/or whose families earn no more than twice the federal poverty level, to help them get into and succeed in college, graduate, and start jobs with solid career paths.⁶ Almost all the students that Bottom Line serves in New York are people of color, the significant majority are women, and most are first-generation college graduates.⁷ Nearly all of Bottom Line's New York students have life experiences shaped deeply by either intergenerational poverty in the United States or by the struggles that recent U.S. immigrants often face.⁸ Bottom Line's *Access* and *Success* programs reflect a significant investment in educational equity and a commitment to opening doors for the many whose potential and drive exceed their opportunity.

"Being able to connect with students who look like you, come from the same communities, and are going through the same experiences as you is very valuable."—Bottom Line alum

"Bottom Line does a great job showing you that regardless of your background, it doesn't mean you can't excel."—Bottom Line alum

The *Access* program works with students through the college application process by helping them make a list of potential colleges, prepare and submit applications, and make final decisions. Since students from low-income backgrounds are more than seven times as likely to drop out of college than students from higher-income backgrounds,⁹ Bottom Line

*“Bottom Line helped me come up with a list of colleges—including reach, safety, and mid-range schools—that matched my credentials and what types of resources were available at each.”
—Bottom Line alum*

focuses on guiding students to think through key critical issues, including selecting a college that is aligned with their personal and academic interests while still making an affordable choice, especially given rising college tuition costs.¹⁰ This focus on affordability has resulted in over 70 percent of students making a “more affordable” college choice each year.

The *Success* program provides tailored supports to college students—of whom just under half participated in *Access*—for up to six years of college (and then for up to six months after college, if they require support in their job search). *Success* advisors focus on supporting students to overcome challenges that may otherwise impede their path to graduation, including selecting a major that aligns with their career aspirations, maintaining efficient progress toward their degree, developing the time management and other study skills necessary for academic success, and securing and maintaining financial aid via all the channels available to them. Bottom Line advisors also provide a listening ear and guidance to students on challenges they may face outside the classroom, including maintaining their mental and emotional well-being, managing relationships with family and friends, and navigating classes and extracurricular activities in environments that are culturally different from their home communities.

“[My Bottom Line advisor] helped me see the importance of networking . . . through Bottom Line I had opportunities to talk to professionals, build connections with mentors. That helped me secure many internships throughout college.”—Bottom Line alum

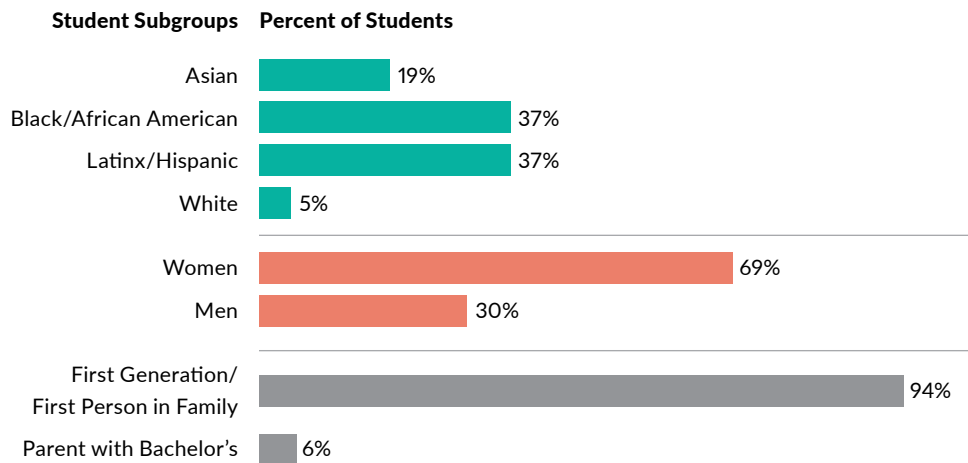
Bottom Line also helps prepare students for a successful career launch. Throughout college, *Success* advisors—with the support of Bottom Line’s Career Connections team, which finds work opportunities and builds corporate partnerships—help students identify and apply to internships as well as create connections to professionals in their fields of interest. *Success* advisors also help students develop high-quality resumes and LinkedIn profiles, and improve their interviewing and other career readiness “soft skills.”

“During my five years of college I met with my advisor about every month. She helped me think through course selection, majors I was interested in and what classes to take for them. Every semester we re-did my FAFSA application. But what I valued most was the emotional support. My advisor came to my school and checked in on me once a month. She helped me re-evaluate my life and my goals, talked me through my stressors and concerns. She helped me stay organized with my school work. Something as small as a printed calendar and a lot of other small things helped keep me together, which was especially important to me being the first in my family to go to college.”—Bottom Line alum

Increased Access for Historically Marginalized Groups

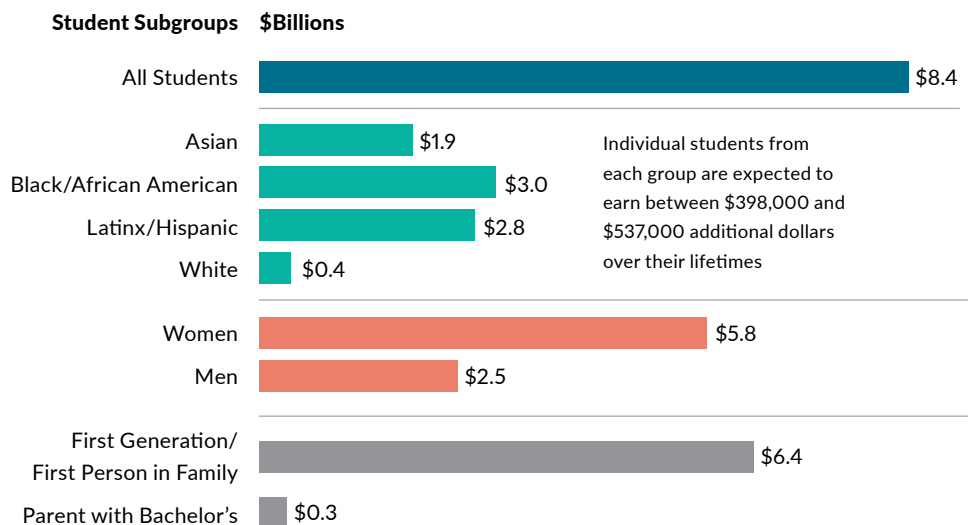
Though students who participate in Bottom Line’s Access and Success programs come from a variety of backgrounds and cities, they represent groups of people who historically have had limited access to college. The vast majority of students (94 percent) are confirmed to be in the first generation in their family to attend college in the U.S. Almost all Bottom Line program participants are students of color (96 percent), and 69 percent are women (see Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4
Groups Served by Bottom Line



Note: Due to rounding and non-mutual exclusivity of categories, the percentages may not add up to 100 percent in Figure 4.

Figure 5
Additional Total Expected Lifetime Earnings for Bottom Line Student Groups



Increased Earning Potential

A college degree dramatically changes economic outcomes for Americans.¹¹ Over their lifetimes, college graduates on average make about \$600,000 more in earnings compared to high school graduates.¹² Public Impact used lifetime earnings estimates and graduation rates for levels of college attainment (some college attendance, associate's, bachelor's, and advanced degrees) to predict the expected lifetime earnings of participants in Bottom Line's programs and to estimate the benefit to students and communities.

ACCESS

Given that students participating in Bottom Line's Access program are about 30 percent more likely to enroll in college when compared to national averages for college-age students (Figure 2, page 6), Public Impact estimates that Access participants will earn on average 55 percent more over their lifetime when compared to students with only a high school diploma (see Figure 6).¹³ In total, since 1997–98, this amounts to over \$2 billion of additional lifetime earnings for all participants in the Access program, or about \$319,000 additional lifetime earnings per participant.¹⁴

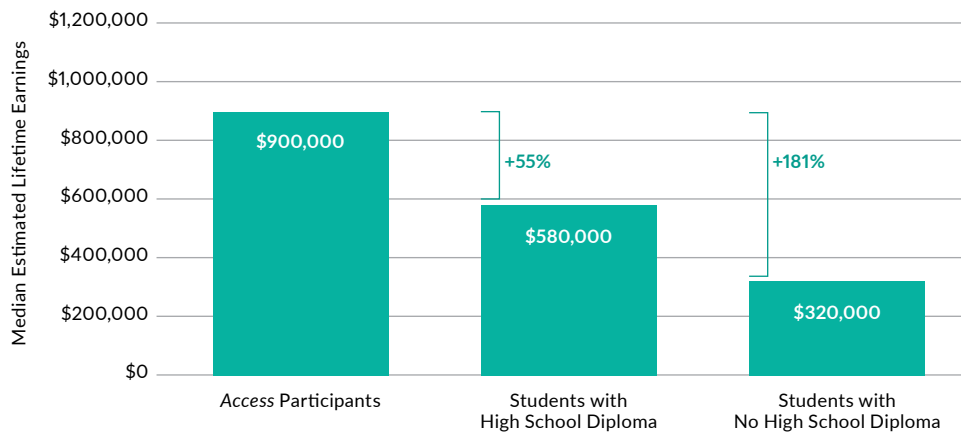
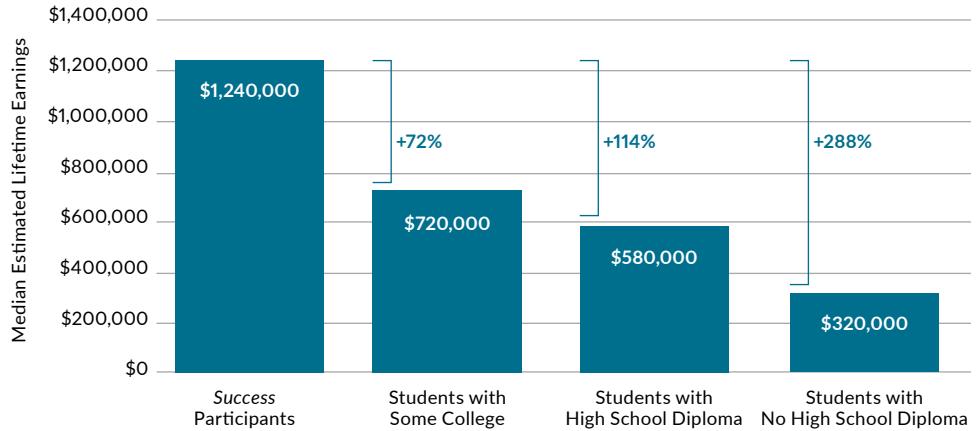


Figure 6
Median Estimated
Lifetime Earnings for
Access Participants
and Students With and
Without High School
Diploma

SUCCESS

Given that students participating in Bottom Line's *Success* program are 21 percent more likely to graduate from college within six years, when compared to national averages¹⁵ (Figure 3, page 7), a participant in Bottom Line's *Success* program will likely earn on average 72 percent more than a student with some college but no degree (Figure 7). In total, this amounts to an additional \$6.2 billion of estimated median lifetime earnings when compared to students with only some college.¹⁶

Figure 7
Median Estimated
Lifetime Earnings for
Success Participants
vs. Others



Regional Benefits

Bottom Line serves students in three cities: Boston, New York City, and Chicago. In the absence of comprehensive sources to estimate where students live after graduation, we assume that if Bottom Line participants were to return to and stay in their home communities upon graduating from college, Figure 8 would show the economic impact that Bottom Line has on each region.¹⁷

- In New York, the 5,400+ students Bottom Line has served since 2010–11 are expected to earn an additional 65 percent over their lifetimes compared to peers. In total, this amounts to over \$2.3 billion.
- In Boston, where Bottom Line started in 1997–98, the 11,000+ students served are expected to earn an additional 76 percent over their lifetimes compared to peers. In total, this amounts to over \$5.4 billion.
- In Chicago, the 2,100+ students Bottom Line has served since 2014–15—primarily through its Access program—are expected to earn an additional 54 percent over their lifetimes compared to peers. In total, this amounts to over \$707 million.

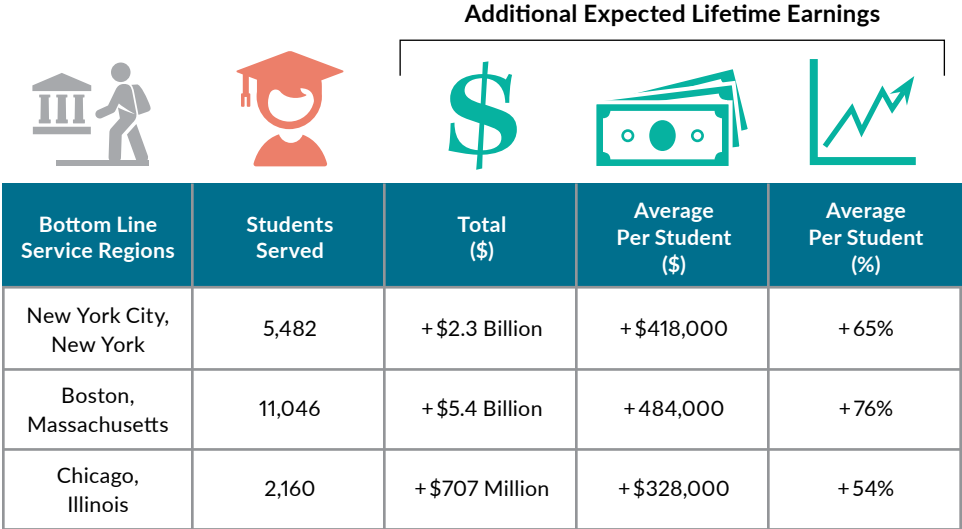


Figure 8
Estimated Economic Benefit to Bottom Line Service Regions*

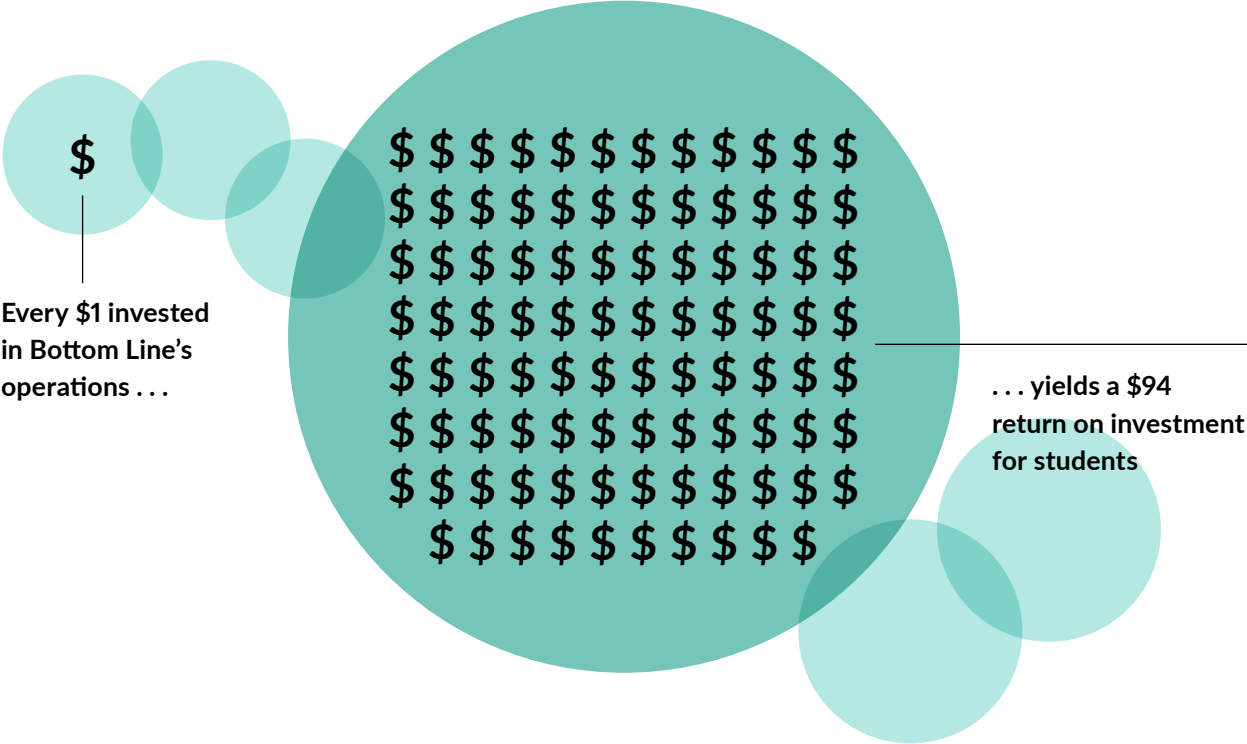
*Note: Students in Boston are estimated to earn more as a percentage than students in New York City or Chicago, according to our model, for two reasons: 1) Bottom Line has served Boston students longer than students in New York and Chicago, so they have had additional time to attain advanced degrees; and 2) when compared to Boston, greater proportions of students in Chicago and New York City have participated in Access only, versus Access plus Success, which leads to a lower average dollar payoff for those two regions.



A Far-Reaching Ripple

The bottom line on Bottom Line is its impact on students. Bottom Line has helped produce thousands of career-ready college graduates; its participants outpace national averages in both college enrollment and college graduation. Moreover, *95 percent* of the 18,000 Bottom Line participants since 1997 come from groups of historically marginalized students. Collectively, Bottom Line participants are estimated to earn more than \$8.4 billion dollars more over their lifetimes than peers who attain only a high school diploma. Based on Bottom Line's expenditure data, this means that every dollar Bottom Line spends generates a \$94 return on investment—per student, that means an additional \$449,000 in additional lifetime earnings. That is about 65 percent more than their peers, marking a significant step toward Bottom Line's quest to create a far-reaching ripple effect that will uplift individuals, families, and entire communities.

Bottom Line's Financial Impact on Students



BOTTOM LINE'S GROWTH

As this report illustrates, Bottom Line plays an essential role in supporting first-generation students from low-income backgrounds to succeed in college and achieve upward economic mobility. Bottom Line intends to continue giving more students the same opportunity.

However, as of this writing, the longer-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education are uncertain. Bottom Line expects the pandemic to result in additional barriers to success for some time to come—for example, ongoing lost income to the families of the students it serves—which means that the need for its services will be greater than ever. Simultaneously, though, the higher education and fundraising landscapes will likely face significant shifts. Accordingly, Bottom Line has temporarily paused its growth strategy with plans to resume expansion activities as soon as is feasible. In the meantime, Bottom Line will continue to serve as many students as possible.



Bottom Line Participants Share Their Stories

Shaffiou Assoumanu



Shaffiou Assoumanu was already steeped in the college application process when a friend connected him to Bottom Line. But Shaffiou—who had come to the U.S. from Togo in western Africa only seven years earlier—welcomed his Bottom Line advisor’s guidance on deciding which college to attend. Shaffiou worked closely with his Bottom Line advisor during his senior year in high school to evaluate which of the schools that accepted him matched his needs, especially academically and financially.

Shaffiou says he started reaping even greater benefits from Bottom Line when classes began. “Since it was my first time in college, I was a little bit nervous; I didn’t know how things would turn out,” he said. “I knew that I wanted a 4.0 GPA by the end of my first semester, and my advisor helped me get to that 4.0 GPA.” Shaffiou knew his long-term goals and credits his Bottom Line advisor for helping him develop the organizational skills that he needed to reach them. His Bottom Line advisor also provided significant support as Shaffiou struggled to choose a major. Torn between several interest areas and planning to transfer to another college, Shaffiou talked with his advisor, who helped him navigate his options as he switched schools.

When Shaffiou became deeply involved in many extracurriculars—joining campus clubs and student associations, volunteering with a campus mentoring program, and working with Bottom Line itself—his grades took a dip, and his advisor offered support there, too.

“My advisor was big on self-care. She checked on me to make sure that I wasn’t doing too much, that I was staying focused in my classes and taking care of myself . . . that’s the key for [students] to do well.”

Bottom Line also helped Shaffiou prepare for life after graduation. Through its networking events with industry partners, Shaffiou secured multiple internships.

After successful undergraduate years, Shaffiou plans to apply to a deferred MBA program at Harvard University. Before attending, he will work full time in finance, an offer that he earned through a strong internship performance, and serve as a Bottom Line fellow to help ensure that more students get the same opportunities he had.

Randa Naim

Randa Naim felt like she was on her own in deciding whether to pursue college. She would be the first in her family to go, from a community where college attendance was rare and a school without the capacity to guide students closely through college planning and decision-making.

Then, during her senior year, she attended a Bottom Line lunch presentation at her school. “[Going to the lunch] was one of the best decisions I ever made,” Randa says. “I didn’t know there were supports for getting into college outside of school. After learning about the guidance Bottom Line could give me to navigate my path to college, it was a no-brainer.”

With Bottom Line’s help, Randa finalized her college choice and gained her foothold on college life. She felt comfortable with course selection, time management, and life on campus, and credits her Bottom Line advisors for their support and encouragement at every point.

Even more valuable, she says, is the support Bottom Line gave her to be ready for post-college life. “Looking into your college future is daunting without having someone who has had that experience to provide guidance,” Randa says. “The same is true for after college.”

Randa had a career path in mind, but she lacked social capital to navigate that path with confidence. She credits experiences gained through Bottom Line activities, including connecting with professionals at networking events, meeting Bottom Line participants attending other area schools, and speaking at fundraisers, for helping her develop confidence in her ability to navigate the working world.

Moreover, “having that sense of community with Bottom Line advisors and other participants is very powerful,” Randa says. Now an electrical design engineer with an international corporation, she volunteers at Bottom Line workshops and finds fulfillment in giving back so early in her career.



Eduardo Bravo

In his senior year of high school, Eduardo Bravo had already started preparing his college applications, though he didn’t think he would end up going to college. He couldn’t imagine how he would pay for it. That was when his high school advisor pointed him toward Bottom Line. “That changed my life,” Eduardo says. “Bottom Line grabbed me by my hand and said, ‘don’t worry, we are here to help.’”

Bottom Line helped Eduardo identify affordable college options and apply for financial aid. His advisor helped him complete his FAFSA and New York State Tuition Assistance program (TAP) forms and obtain all necessary tax information for both. His advisor helped Eduardo identify and apply for scholarships that would close the gap between tuition cost and financial aid, and made sure that he submitted necessary forms and paperwork every year to renew his financial aid. In addition to financial supports,



Eduardo's Bottom Line advisor helped him select and register for classes, identify study priorities and organize himself to meet them, and declare and later change his major without jeopardizing his financial aid or otherwise missing a beat on his path to graduation.

Eduardo's Bottom Line advisor also helped him plan his future after college. Uncertain of what he wanted to do, Eduardo leaned into the guidance of one Bottom Line advisor who offered to help him explore his options. She encouraged him to think about graduate school—something that Eduardo didn't know much about or consider as an option—and helped him explore graduate chemistry programs. But Eduardo also wanted work experience, so, following his lead, Eduardo's advisor helped him conduct a job search. Eduardo earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry and worked as a lab technician before beginning his PhD program in chemistry. Two years into his graduate work, he dreams of a post-doctoral experience followed by a career in industry. Eduardo is the first in his family to attend college and will be the first to attain a PhD. He is proud of his success and credits Bottom Line for helping him achieve his goals.

Yesenny Fernandez



Yesenny Fernandez, a first-generation college student, connected with Bottom Line after her junior year of high school to seek help navigating the college application and decision process and to get support while in college. What she didn't realize was that Bottom Line would also help her make social and professional connections that would benefit her through college and into her career.

At college, Yesenny quickly realized that many of her classmates were also involved with Bottom Line and worked with her advisor. Those connections became a big part of her social network. "It was a great moment when I met all these people from Bottom Line in the same school I was going to," Yesenny says.

Throughout college, Yesenny met with her Bottom Line advisor, who reviewed her academic progress and financial planning—and more importantly to Yesenny—supported her in all aspects of her life. Yesenny's advisor provided a listening ear when her family experienced a difficult time in her sophomore year. Her advisor began speaking with her during her junior year about life after college and connecting her to professionals in the advisor's own network who worked with organizations in Yesenny's fields of interest. One of these connections would pay off after graduation, when Yesenny applied to her top internship choice doing data analysis and visualization work with UNICEF's Nutrition Section. "There were thousands of applicants, but with the connection I had made two years prior, I was actually able to get [the internship]."

Yesenny's internship evolved into a part-time job, which allows her time for a fellowship with DonorsChoose, another opportunity facilitated through her Bottom Line connections. Now, with gratitude for her advisor's support over the past seven years, Yesenny is pursuing her dream to earn a master's degree in data visualization and analytics.

Kevwe Abamwa

Kevwe Abamwa did not need Bottom Line's help getting into college; with her choice made, though, she heard about the academic and career supports Bottom Line provides. Entrepreneurial by nature, Kevwe had set her long-term goals and wanted all the help she could get to reach them.

Throughout college, Kevwe's Bottom Line advisor helped her plan the intermediate steps to her long-term goals and work through obstacles.

For example, after starting as a biology major, Kevwe became more interested in sociology and criminal justice, but worried about how those fields would translate into a career. She credits her Bottom Line advisor with encouraging her to pursue her interests and helping her think through opportunities, including internships, where her new studies would be relevant. "He really put into perspective what college was, and really allowed me to dive into my experiences as I was growing into myself."

Another challenge arose during her sophomore year, when Kevwe decided she wanted to change schools. The college she chose initially met her budget requirements, but she soon realized that it fell short on opportunities for people of color to engage in campus life. Though the school where she chose to spend her final two years was not one to which a Bottom Line advisor was assigned, her advisor connected her to another advisor at a nearby school and continued to stay in touch remotely. With their support and guidance, Kevwe developed a plan to graduate a semester early and participate in internships that would position her for a job immediately upon graduation.

Kevwe now works full time at a New York city government office, and she runs her own business helping businesses owned by women and people of color to scale up their operations. She remains involved with Bottom Line, helping current students connect to social service opportunities. "Bottom Line allowed me to tap into who I am," she says. "I am confident [in myself], but they gave me tools to excel."



Notes

1. The national average student-to-counselor ratio exceeds the American School Counselor Association's recommendation of 250:1. See: American School Counselor Association. (2020). *Student-to-school-counselor ratios*. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios>
2. National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). College participation rates. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rea.asp#:~:text=In%202016%2C%20the%20total%20college,Alaska%20Native%20\(19%20percent\)](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rea.asp#:~:text=In%202016%2C%20the%20total%20college,Alaska%20Native%20(19%20percent)); National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). Immediate college enrollment rate. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/Indicator_CPA/coe_cpa_2018_05.pdf
3. National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Immediate college enrollment rate. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp#:~:text=The%20overall%20immediate%20college%20enrollment,from%20the%20rate%20in%202010.
4. National Center for Education Statistics. (2019) Percentage distribution of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions 6 years after entry. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_326.15.asp?current=yes
5. Additionally, researchers from the University of Virginia and Texas A&M are conducting a randomized control trial assessing the impact of Bottom Line's program. So far, their results indicate that Bottom Line has a significant impact on students enrolling and persisting in college. See: Barr, A., & Castelman, B. (2017). *The bottom line on college counseling*. Retrieved from https://www.bottomline.org/sites/default/files/The%20Bottom%20Line%20on%20College%20Counseling%20RCTPaper_10_2017.pdf
6. Bottom Line's Access and Success programs prioritize serving high school students who have a minimum GPA of 80 on a 100 point scale (equivalent to B- or better), which ensures that they are serving students who are academically ready for college.
7. In the 2020–21 academic year, 43 percent are Latinx/Hispanic; 23 percent are black or African-American; 22 percent are Asian; 6 percent are multiracial; 3 percent identify as "other"; and 3 percent are white. Sixty-nine percent identify as women and 31 percent as men.
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12. Hershbein, B., & Kearney, M. (2012). *Major decisions: What graduates earn over their lifetimes*. Washington, DC: The Hamilton Project. Retrieved from https://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads_and_links/FINAL_MajorDecisions-Appendix_Table_2.pdf
13. The estimates for lifetime earnings for Access students are based on national-level six-year college graduation rates to retain consistency with the estimation method for calculating earnings for Success students.
14. Lifetime earnings are based on full-time, full-year workers from 25 to 64 years old. See: Carnevale, A., et al. (2014). *The college payoff*. Washington, DC: Georgetown, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/collegepayoff-complete.pdf>
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16. To draw comparisons, we use the group of students with "some college but no degree" as the counterfactual. Students who do not participate in Bottom Line's Success program may certainly graduate.
17. Students in Boston are estimated to earn more as a percentage than students in New York City or Chicago, according to our model, for two reasons: 1) Bottom Line has served Boston students longer than students in New York and Chicago, so they have had additional time to attain advanced degrees; and 2) when compared with Boston, greater proportions of students in Chicago and New York City have participated in Access only, versus Access plus Success, which leads to a lower average dollar payoff for those two regions.