Bottom Line: Helping Boston Students Access and Complete College

OVERVIEW

Program Basics
- Bottom Line is a college access and completion program that helps low-income students navigate the pathway to and through college.
- In high school, the program provides participants with an advisor that helps them select colleges, complete applications, apply for financial aid, and make enrollment decisions.
- Once participants are in college, the program provides academic, social, and career support.

How Does Bottom Line Improve Economic Mobility?
- Bottom Line improves the likelihood of participants enrolling in and completing college. Obtaining a postsecondary degree positions individuals for high-quality employment and higher lifetime earnings.
- The program seeks to ensure that participants graduate from college with manageable levels of student debt. Burdensome levels of student debt are linked to a range of outcomes that hamper upward economic mobility.

EVIDENCE LEVEL: STRONG (SECOND-HIGHEST TIER)

Ranked as having the highest level of evidence by the U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Program cost</th>
<th>Implementation locations</th>
<th>Dates active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school students</td>
<td>Approximately $4,000 per offered student</td>
<td>Boston and Worcester, MA; New York City, NY; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1997–present</td>
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</tbody>
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Bottom Line-Boston
In 2008, public and civic leaders in Boston recognized the need for programming and supports to help students from lower-income families navigate the pathway to and through college. Led by then-Mayor Thomas Menino, the Success Boston initiative was formed. The initiative sought to significantly increase the number of BPS graduates who graduated from college. Bottom Line, a college access and completion support program, started in Boston in 1997. In the decade prior to Success Boston, the program had demonstrated strong results in helping college-bound students from lower-income backgrounds apply to, enroll in, and graduate from college. It was chosen as one of the primary service delivery partners for the Success Boston initiative.

Bottom Line focuses on supporting first-generation students from lower-income families in the academic middle ground. Each participant is provided with an Advisor, who guides them in creating college lists, completing their applications, applying for and analyzing financial aid, and making an informed decision on where to enroll.

Once students are in college, Bottom Line continues to provide individualized academic, social, and career support on campus.

**The Challenge**
- In the late 1990s and early 2000s, only 35 percent of students who graduated from Boston Public Schools (BPS) were enrolling in and completing college.
- During this period, only one out of every seven students from BPS from low-income backgrounds who started college would go on to finish. Only 28 and 24 percent of Black and Hispanic BPS graduates, respectively, completed college within seven years.
- With an increasing percentage of jobs in Boston requiring at least some post-secondary training, without action, lower-income communities of color would be left further and further behind.

**The Solution**
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**Major Accomplishments**
- Bottom Line has grown from serving 25 students in one Boston high school in 1997 to serving over 3,000 students across the entire city today, a significant share of the total number of college-bound students from lower-income backgrounds in the city.
- The program has developed close partnerships with public schools and colleges across the state of Massachusetts, enabling them to reach the students most in need, orient them towards colleges that are a good fit, and support them through graduation.
- In recent years, Bottom Line has maintained strong outcomes on key performance indicators. Of all Bottom Line students in Massachusetts, 93 percent commit to a specific college before graduating high school, and 94 percent of students persist into their second year.

**OUTCOMES & EVIDENCE**
- Preliminary results from an independent randomized controlled trial has demonstrated that Bottom Line creates positive effects on college enrollment and four-year college enrollment.
- 92 percent of Bottom Line participants in Massachusetts enroll in four-year colleges.
- 78 percent of Bottom Line’s participants in Massachusetts graduate from college within six years.
- 79 percent of Bottom Line’s 2020 college graduates are employed full-time or continuing their education.
BOTTOM LINE'S IMPLEMENTATION IN BOSTON

Keys to Success

- Targeting public high schools in Boston that have particularly high guidance-counselor-to-student ratios ensures that Bottom Line is reaching students who are most in need of assistance.
- Maintaining a healthy balance of public, philanthropic, and private funding has provided Bottom Line with the ability to serve every student for up to seven years, starting from when they are seniors in high school to when they graduate college and six months beyond.
- Students’ early-stage participation is key to their success in the program, and established relationships with public schools, community-based organizations, and other referral partners help ensure that participants are fully engaged from day one.
- Close relationships with partner colleges ensure that Bottom Line advisors are able to help students find colleges well suited to their individual academic, social, and financial needs.
- A deep organizational commitment to data and evidence have helped build trust among public and philanthropic funders, maintained program effectiveness, and enabled continuous improvement.

TIMELINE

BOTTOM LINE IS FOUNDED
1997
Dave Borgal, a former guidance counselor, opens an office on the first floor of a high school in Boston. He works with 25 students and all get accepted to college. By 2000, the program serves 250 students.

GREG JOHNSON BECOMES BOTTOM LINE’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
2003
Bottom Line doubles size of its college access program, formalizes college student advising, and experiments with larger caseload. The program scales to serve 880 students and has 265 alumni by 2007.

SUCCESS BOSTON LAUNCHES
2008
Led by Mayor Thomas Menino, public and civic sector leaders come together to create Success Boston, an initiative focused on college access and completion for high school students in Boston Public Schools. Bottom Line is chosen as one of the primary service providers for the initiative.

BOTTOM LINE BEGINS MAJOR GROWTH CAMPAIGN
2012
Bottom Line begins a $5 million growth campaign for their operations in Boston, aiming specifically to serve larger numbers of students in the city’s lowest-income neighborhoods and triple overall participation. During this period, the program receives a $2.5 million grant from the Lewis Family Foundation.

BOTTOM LINE BEGINS RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL
2014
To rigorously assess the effectiveness of their model, Bottom Line partners with Dr. Ben Castleman of the University of Virginia to conduct an evaluation. Initial results are published in 2016 and demonstrate a substantial positive effect on college enrollment and persistence.

BOTTOM LINE PARTNERS WITH STATE STREET BOSTON WINS
2015
The Boston Workforce Investment Network (Boston WIns), a $26 million philanthropic initiative funded by State Street, is created to help prepare Boston youth for the workforce. Bottom Line is chosen as one of five nonprofit partners to provide a continuum of services for students to graduate from high school, complete postsecondary education, and gain high-quality employment.
THE PROCESS

Confronting the Problem

- In the late 1990s and early 2000s, only 35 percent of graduates of Boston's public high schools went on to complete college.
- In 2008, then-Mayor Thomas Menino and Boston business and civic leaders identify the need for new services to help high school graduates enroll in and complete college.
- The initiative, known as Success Boston, funds several providers to deliver coaching and support services to college-bound students from lower-income families. Bottom Line is chosen as one of the delivery partners for this strategy.

Designing the Strategy

- Bottom Line’s model addresses college enrollment, persistence, and completion, with supports for students starting in their senior year of high school and continuing through college for up to six years.
- The model has two distinct phases: Access and Success. In the Access phase, every student receives a dedicated, highly trained Advisor who works with them to solidify their pathway to a college that will be a good fit academically, socially, and financially.
- The Success phase begins once students are in college. Advisors provide support in picking a major, accumulating applicable credits, remaining in good academic standing, developing career interests, gaining career-relevant work experience, renewing financial aid, managing the cost of college, and other general life skills.
- Advisors develop deep relationships with their students, and the trust and support that comes from these relationships undergirds the effectiveness of the model.

Allocating the Funding

- Over the course of its existence, Bottom Line has achieved a balance of public and philanthropic funding.
- Through Success Boston, Bottom Line received a mix of philanthropic and public funding. When Success Boston is awarded a $2.7 million dollar grant from the White House Social Innovation Fund, and Bottom Line was the single-largest recipient of these funds.
- In 2012, as Bottom Line sought to triple enrollment and serve larger numbers of students in Boston’s lowest-income neighborhoods, it received a $2.5 million grant from the Lewis Family Foundation.
- The program has received funding state funding in five of the past six years.
Implementing the Plan

In 2007, the year before Success Boston launched, Bottom Line served a total of 880 students in its Access and Success programs.

With funding from Success Boston, Bottom Line was able to expand to serve 1,100 students in Massachusetts. To accommodate this growth, the program hired additional staff and moved to a larger office space.

In 2012, as Bottom Line sought to triple enrollment and reach more students in Boston's lowest-income neighborhoods, the program hired a community engagement manager to lead outreach and build stronger connections to communities in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan.

The Boston WINs initiative further strengthened Bottom Line's ability to reach students, linking the program with several other nonprofit partners and creating more coordinated action with Boston Public Schools.

Measuring & Refining the Approach

Bottom Line begins an independent, randomized control trial in 2014. Early-stage results in 2016 found that the model large positive effects on college enrollment and four-year college enrollment and completion. Results on college completion are expected in late 2021.

At every phase of a student's participation, the organization tracks a range of measures to ensure participants can receive support and overcome obstacles.

Bottom Line's key performance indicators include: students committing to a college by June 1; students committing to an affordable college option; college persistence; 4-, 5-, and 6-year graduation rates; students graduating with less than $31,000 in debt; and students employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation.
RESOURCES

- Bottom Line program website
- U.S. Department of Education overview of Bottom Line RCT
- Success Boston website
- State Street’s Boston Workforce Investment Network (Boston WINs)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Results for America would like to thank the following individuals for their help in completing this case study: Steve Colon, Billi Solis-O’Brien, and Ginette Saimprevil of Bottom Line, and Emerson Foster.

THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY CATALOG

This case study is part of Results for America’s Economic Mobility Catalog, a tool designed to help local government leaders identify and implement evidence-based strategies to improve economic mobility outcomes for their residents. The Economic Mobility Catalog is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the foundation.

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