

# Bottom Line

Intervention Brief | Transition to College Topic Area

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE™

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Enrolling in college and completing a degree or certificate is one of the primary pathways to economic success. In 2018, median weekly earnings of full-time workers with a bachelor’s degree were 57 percent higher than full-time workers with a high school diploma only. Despite the economic advantages of educational attainment, only 33 percent of students enrolled in two-year institutions complete their programs within three years and 62 percent of students enrolled in four-year institutions complete their programs within six years.<sup>1</sup> Several programs have been designed to support college enrollment and retention among college students. One example is *Bottom Line*. *Bottom Line* provides intensive advising for low-income high school students, most of whom are the first in their family to go to college. The advising is designed to help students apply for college and financial aid and select a high-quality, affordable

institution. For students who attend one of *Bottom Line*’s target colleges, which they identified as providing a high-quality education at an affordable price, *Bottom Line* continues to provide regular support to students on campus for up to six years.<sup>2</sup>

This What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report, part of the WWC’s Transition to College topic area, explores the effects of *Bottom Line* on enrolling and progressing in college. The WWC identified two studies of *Bottom Line*, one of which meets WWC standards. The evidence presented in this report is from one study of the impact of *Bottom Line* on high school and college students—including African-American, Hispanic, and Asian students—based in Boston, New York City, and Worcester, Massachusetts.

## What Happens When Students Participate in *Bottom Line*?<sup>3</sup>

The evidence indicates that implementing *Bottom Line*:

- may increase college enrollment
- may increase progression in college

Findings on *Bottom Line* from the one study that meets WWC standards are shown in Table 1. The table reports an effectiveness rating and the number of studies and students that contributed to the findings.

**Table 1. Summary of findings on *Bottom Line* from one study that meets WWC Standards**

Outcome domain	Effectiveness rating	Average performance (study findings)		Evidence meeting WWC standards (version 4.0)	
		Intervention group	Comparison group	Number of studies	Number of students
College enrollment	Potentially positive effects	81% enrolled	70% enrolled	1	2,422
Progressing in college	Potentially positive effects	80% progressing	71% progressing	1	1,429

Note: Average performance values (study findings) are generated by one analysis conducted for each outcome, as reported by Barr & Castleman (2017). The college enrollment outcome reported in this study represents enrollment in a 4-year college. The progressing in college outcome reported in this study represents being enrolled in college for three or more semesters after high school. The effects of *Bottom Line* are not known for other outcomes within the Transition to College topic area, including middle school academic achievement, high school academic achievement, middle school attendance, high school attendance, college readiness, staying in high school, progressing in high school, completing high school, college attendance, college academic achievement, college degree attainment, and labor market outcomes.

## BOX 1. HOW THE WWC REVIEWS AND DESCRIBES EVIDENCE

The WWC evaluates evidence based on the quality and results of reviewed studies. The criteria the WWC uses for evaluating evidence are defined in the [Procedures and Standards Handbooks](#) and the [Review Protocols](#). The studies summarized in this report were reviewed under WWC Standards (version 4.0) and the Transition to College topic area protocol (version 4.0).

To determine the effectiveness rating, the WWC considers what methods each study used, the direction of the effects, and the number of studies that tested the intervention. The higher the effectiveness rating, the more certain the WWC is about the reported results and about what will happen if the same intervention is implemented again. The following key explains the relationship between effectiveness ratings and the statements used in this report:

Effectiveness rating	Rating interpretation	Description of the evidence
Positive (or negative) effects	The intervention is <i>likely</i> to change an outcome	Strong evidence of a positive (or negative) effect, with no overriding contrary evidence
Potentially positive (or negative) effects	The intervention <i>may</i> change an outcome	Evidence of a positive (or negative) effect with no overriding contrary evidence
No discernible effects	The intervention <i>may result in little to no change</i> in an outcome	No affirmative evidence of effects
Mixed effects	The intervention <i>has inconsistent effects</i> on an outcome	Evidence includes studies in at least two of these categories: studies with positive effects, studies with negative effects, or more studies with indeterminate effects than with positive or negative effects

### How is *Bottom Line* Implemented?

The following section provides details of how *Bottom Line* was implemented. This information can help educators identify the requirements for implementing *Bottom Line* and determine whether implementing this intervention would be feasible in their districts, schools, or colleges. Information on *Bottom Line* presented in this section comes from the one study that meets WWC standards (Barr & Castleman, 2017) and from correspondence with the developer.

- **Goal:** *Bottom Line* aims to help students to enroll in high-quality, affordable colleges and persist in college to attain a degree.
- **Target population:** *Bottom Line* is designed for students from low-income backgrounds, most of whom are the first in their family to go to college. Students of color comprise the majority of those served by *Bottom Line*. The majority of students learn about *Bottom Line* through word of mouth referrals, but *Bottom Line* also actively recruits students through recruitment events at local college fairs, as well as through schools and local organizations. They target school districts in each region and specific schools within each district.
- **Method of delivery:** *Bottom Line* advisors provide individualized guidance to high school students in preparing college applications, applying for financial aid, searching for scholarships, and selecting colleges that align with each student's goals. *Bottom Line* advisors at target colleges

provide the ongoing structure and support needed for students to graduate and achieve their career goals.

- **Frequency and duration of service:** High school students meet with their *Bottom Line* advisors for an hour every three to four weeks during the college application and selection process. College students meet with their *Bottom Line* advisors three to four times per semester. For both high school and college students, additional contacts are held between meetings through a combination of texting, email, and video or phone calls.
- **Intervention components:** The *Bottom Line* college advising model includes *Bottom Line Access* for high school juniors and seniors, and *Bottom Line Success*, which entails advising for those students who attend a target college. See Table 2 for additional details. A new initiative called *Career Connections* was launched in 2018 to strengthen *Bottom Line's* capacity to build students' career readiness skills and strengthen pathways to the experiences and professional connections needed to launch a career.

**Comparison group:** In the one study that contributes to this intervention report, students in the comparison group did not have access to *Bottom Line* support, but they were able to access existing college advising support services.

**Table 2. Components of *Bottom Line***

Key component	Description
<b>One-on-one college application advising</b>	<p><i>Bottom Line</i> advisors begin advising students between the end of their junior year in high school and the beginning of their senior year. They have average caseloads of 65 students. Students meet individually with their advisor for about an hour every three to four weeks at <i>Bottom Line</i>'s office within their community. Using the LEAD Model (Lists, Essays, Applications, Decisions), advisors help students compile lists of potential colleges to consider, write essays, and complete their applications.</p> <p><i>Bottom Line</i> advisors encourage students to apply to a set of target colleges and universities in the area that they have identified as providing a high-quality education at an affordable price. In each of the three major cities in which <i>Bottom Line</i> is located (Boston, New York City, and Chicago),<sup>4</sup> <i>Bottom Line</i> has about ten to twenty target institutions they recommend to students.</p>
<b>Financial aid support</b>	College affordability is a principal focus for <i>Bottom Line</i> . Advisors help students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and supplementary financial aid forms. They also help students search for additional scholarships and make informed decisions about the affordability of each school they are considering.
<b>College selection guidance</b>	<i>Bottom Line</i> advisors help students review college acceptances and financial aid packages, ensuring they have a good understanding of the cost of attendance and select a college that is aligned with their goals.
<b>Transition assistance</b>	Approximately 50 percent of students choose to enroll in one of the target institutions and can continue into the <i>Bottom Line Success</i> program. In the summer after high school, advisors support students with completing all enrollment requirements, including scheduling placement tests, preparing a payment plan, and attending orientation.
<b>College orientation and continued support</b>	<p><i>Bottom Line Success</i> advisors are located at each target institution. Advisors have an average caseload of 85 students and meet with students about three to four times per semester to provide the following supports connected to their DEAL model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Degree</b> – including connections with tutoring, advising, and other resources</li> <li>• <b>Employability</b> – including identifying students' desired career, building a strong resume, strengthening their networks, and connecting to career-relevant experiences</li> <li>• <b>Affordability</b> – ensuring students complete financial aid requirements and have a plan to pay their tuition bills each semester</li> <li>• <b>Life</b> – including adjusting to college life, getting involved with extracurricular activities, and balancing their workload with other activities and responsibilities</li> </ul> <p><i>Bottom Line</i> continues to provide support to students while they are in college for up to six years.</p>

### What Does *Bottom Line* Cost?

This preliminary list of costs is not designed to be exhaustive; rather, it provides educators an overview of the major resources needed to implement *Bottom Line*. The program costs described in Table 3 are based on the information available as of August 2020.

*Bottom Line* is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is nearly fully funded by private and corporate donors and

foundations. The total cost per student receiving intensive advising through the *Bottom Line Access* and *Bottom Line Success* programs is approximately \$6,000 over a five- to six-year period. These costs are paid for by *Bottom Line*, and the target colleges provide access to their facilities. Students and families incur no costs.

**Table 3. Cost ingredients for *Bottom Line***

Cost Ingredients	Description	Source of funding
<b>Personnel</b>	<i>Bottom Line</i> is staffed by full-time advisors with college degrees who provide direct services to high school and college students. Advisors spend their first year learning the organization's curriculum, building relationships with students and staff, serving their caseload, and mastering advisor competencies. Returning advisors take on additional responsibilities, such as helping to plan career-readiness events or organizing care package assembly events for students. Program administrators support the program and conduct recruitment activities.	<i>Bottom Line</i>
<b>Facilities</b>	Facilities costs include space for administrative staff and for providing services. <i>Bottom Line Access</i> has offices in each of the communities served where high school students meet with their advisors. <i>Bottom Line Success</i> has offices in each target college they work with where college students can meet with their advisors.	<i>Bottom Line</i> ; colleges
<b>Equipment and materials</b>	Standard information technology (IT) equipment such as computers, phones, printers, and photocopiers for staff is required.	<i>Bottom Line</i>
<b>Direct assistance</b>	Colleges may waive the application fee for <i>Bottom Line</i> participants.	Colleges

## For More Information:

### About *Bottom Line*

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### About the cost of the intervention

Web: <https://www.bottomline.org/>

### About the study reviewed

Barr, A., & Castleman, B. (2017). *The bottom line on college counseling*. Boston, MA: Bottom Line. Retrieved from

[https://www.bottomline.org/sites/default/files/The%20Bottom%20Line%20on%20College%20Counseling%20RCTPaper\\_10\\_2017.pdf](https://www.bottomline.org/sites/default/files/The%20Bottom%20Line%20on%20College%20Counseling%20RCTPaper_10_2017.pdf)

## In What Context Was *Bottom Line* Studied?

The following section provides information on the setting of the one study of *Bottom Line* that meets WWC standards, and a description of the participants in the research.

This information can help educators understand the context in which the study of *Bottom Line* was conducted, and determine whether the program might be suitable for their setting.

### WHERE THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

1 study, 2,422 students in Boston, New York City, and Worcester, Massachusetts



#### Race



#### Ethnicity



#### Gender



#### Grades



## LEARN MORE



Read more about the *Bottom Line* intervention and the studies that are summarized here in the [Intervention Report](#).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>McFarland, J., Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Wang, X., Wang, K., Hein, S., Diliberti, M., Forrest Cataldi, E., Bullock Mann, F., and Barmer, A. (2019). *The Condition of Education 2019* (NCES 2019-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019144>

<sup>2</sup>The descriptive information for this intervention comes from Barr & Castleman (2017). The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) requests developers review the intervention description sections for accuracy from their perspective. The WWC provided the developer with the intervention

description in August 2020 and the WWC incorporated feedback from the developer. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this intervention is beyond the scope of this review.

<sup>3</sup>The literature search reflects documents publicly available by May 2020. Reviews of the studies in this report used the standards from the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 4.0) and the Transition to College review protocol (version 4.0). The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions could change as new research becomes available.

<sup>4</sup>The target colleges for Worcester, Massachusetts are the same as those for Boston.