

# Defies Measurement

## Activity Guide – Campbell’s Law

Discuss the topic below and then make a presentation to the group. The presentation will be in the form of a proposal to the local school board. Using the information you learn about Campbell’s Law, be sure to state the problem that currently exists in the local school or district and then lay out the proposed solution. Or, if there isn’t a problem, then propose a new plan that would add something positive to the school and/or district.

### CAMPBELL’S LAW

In *Defies Measurement*, David Berliner brings up the Social Science law called “Campbell’s Law”. In his (off-screen) interview, he says that “It stated very clearly that anytime some metric you’re using takes on too much value, then it gets corrupted.” Robert Crease adds to this by saying “The minute you say you’re going to assess student intelligence in terms of SAT scores, then a whole industry develops around boosting SAT scores instead of intelligence, which is what you’re trying to measure after all.”

Here is a quote from the law:

*“The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.”*

In regard to the tests, Linda Darling-Hammond says, *“One of the tragedies of the school reform movement in the United States is that it has been so organized around high stakes testing. We have guided most of the reform movement based on the results of these very low quality tests that measure a tiny fraction of what really matters and drive instruction away from the most important kinds of learning.”*

For discussion:

How have you seen Campbell's Law at play in K-12 testing on the national level and in your own school community?

How much value is placed on test score results in your local school or school district?

What are some ways in which public schools can avoid the pitfalls of Campbell’s Law?