It's time to fight excessive testing.

Politicians and government are pushing testing as a solution to problems in education and more articulation of so-called "new" standards on principals, teachers, parents, and students. These testing victims have no more voice in bringing these leaders to their senses than peasants under the rule of the nobility.

Superintendents are reluctant pushers who buy the official testing line only because money for their districts is at stake, and they don't want to anger their school boards. A few school board members may try to fight the excessive testing, but the promise of more money wins. Hundreds of millions of dollars and untold hours of professional staff time have been spent on developing, implementing and studying the results of the testing.

Testing is an attractive "policy" because it gives the appearance of doing something about the poor performance of a significant portion of our students in this country. Doing something is what politicians and government officials like, even when there is no evidence that that something works.

Let's face it, the secretary of education and his department, the state apparatus dealing with education, the superintendent and even to some extent the principal cannot control what teachers do in the classroom or judgments teachers make about students. The answer to this lack of control is "let's test." Making students take tests and giving or withholding money is just about the only thing under control of government officials. They cannot shape the behavior of the teachers any more than cutting a teenager's allowance can get her to study.

To further juice up the excessive testing, the educational elite has added the Common Core and started talking about college and career readiness, even as they do nothing to fix the bloated and archaic curriculum.

This old wine in new bottles has led to changes in the tests and so far, lower scores. But it obscures the basic questions: What are the consequences of excessive testing, and what is the magic bullet to fix our educational system? Meanwhile, the commercial publishers and educational researchers and developers are making boatloads of money.

If the extensive testing now ravaging our educational system is not the answer, what is the answer for the relatively poor performance of our students? One answer is to free our teachers to do their job without interference from politicians and bureaucrats hundreds if not thousands of miles away.

We need to restore a chain of command in which teachers have the freedom to adapt to their students, and principals have the major responsibility for evaluating the teachers. Micro-managing teachers from Washington and state capitals through producing new "standards" and by making all students take new tests will not work.

There is some room for optimism. The current excessive testing mania is collapsing and will continue to collapse. As more money is spent, test results decline, and new politicians and
government officials replace the lost generation of test lovers, the entire system will collapse under its own weight. The sooner the better, because we are losing our best teachers and principals.

Bill Coplin is a professor of public policy at the Maxwell School and The College of Arts and Sciences, Syracuse University, and author of "Ten Things Employers Want You to Learn in College." wdcoplin@maxwell.syr.edu, billcoplin.org.