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What are you doing to fight climate change?

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The City Council has passed a number of bills meant to address climate change in recent years: a goal of 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, in addition to building code regulations and efforts to increase use of solar panels.

These are worthy aims and small tweaks meant to do what is possible on the local level to deal with climate change, though of course it's a larger problem than one city.

This week, the council passed a resolution that goes at the challenge in a different way — through education: urging the state Department of Education to include climate change lessons in K-12 curricula. The idea originated with high school activists from Global Kids, who rallied at City Hall in 2014 and continued lobbying councilmembers, circulating a Change.org petition saying in part that the NYC school system has a “moral responsibility” to teach climate change, particularly in the wake of Superstorm Sandy.

Acting globally and locally

Global leaders are scheduled to sign the Paris agreement on climate change Friday. The landmark accord commits nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and signals to the fossil fuel industry that the world is moving towards a low-carbon future.

But even the accord's more hopeful supporters admit that the reductions themselves likely won't get us all the way to the 2-degree Celsius cap needed to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. It's a first step, but mostly useful if built upon.

On a smaller scale, the City Council resolution echoes that aim.

Even our most drastic changes in the present are only first steps, and must be furthered by future generations. The resolution notes the National Center for Science Education's call for climate change to be taught in schools so that future generations can make “scientifically informed decisions about the consequences of climate change.”

The resolution has no force of law, and the state Department of Education did not comment about the possibility of changes to curricula. But the resolution's prime sponsor, Councilmember Costa G. Constantinides says it's a recognition that climate change "affects our politics and economics," and must be addressed with "creative" solutions. Quite possibly, those solutions will come from the next generation: a tech savvy generation.

"My son knows more about my tablet than I do," Constantinides says. "He's six. As he maneuvers through the world he will understand technology in a way that I am limited by age."

Such tech knowledge can, hopefully, allow future generations to "attack" climate change — if they're prepared for it.

A real local problem

Since Sandy, the threat of climate change has seemed a little more real in NYC, its floodwaters premonitions of a vulnerable city.

"We're a city surrounded by water," says Constantinides, noting the possibility for people losing their homes if sea levels rise as expected — a permanent scenario for those who had to temporarily leave homes after Sandy. Each neighborhood will have its own problems: for his own, Constantinides notes that 55 percent of the city's power is supplied within his district, which is also largely within a flood zone. What happens if that power is regularly knocked out?

Dr. Vivien Gornitz, of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and a contributor to the New York City Panel on Climate Change 2015 Report, which investigated the city's climate resiliency, says some parts of the country are "resistant" to the point of having "their heads in the sand." More public awareness is highly necessary, even here.

Awareness is necessary to make the Paris agreement more than words on a page, for example, as national leaders now try to do what they've committed to do. For now, it's an agreement in principle, like this resolution. The consequential work lies ahead.

Climate change "is not something that's going to go away," says Gornitz. "It's only going to get worse. We haven't seen anything yet."