

Garrison School Board Passes Climate-Change Resolution

By Chip Rowe on July 20, 2018 · 2 Comments

After debate, calls on elected officials to take action

By Chip Rowe

Following 25 minutes of debate at an earlier meeting about whether school boards should take stands on political issues — and whether global warming qualifies — the Garrison Board of Education on July 11 unanimously approved a resolution calling on elected officials to “implement concrete steps to mitigate climate change.”

Krystal Ford, a Garrison parent, lobbied the board to adopt the resolution as part of a nascent national initiative organized by Schools for Climate Action. Its website lists 22 boards that have passed resolutions since December, but 21 are located in California; the other is in Colorado. Garrison will be the first district on the list from the East Coast, she said. There are more than 13,000 districts in the U.S.

Ford had a passionate ally in Trustee David Gelber, a former 60 Minutes producer who co-created *Years of Living Dangerously*, a documentary series that examines the global effects of climate change.

The initial draft of the resolution, presented June 11, was met with some skepticism by board President Ray O’Rourke and Trustee Derek DuBois, who suggested, as an example, that the board could discuss concrete steps to add the issue to the curriculum. “I’m all for the spirit, but I’m a little unclear on what we are trying to achieve,” DuBois said.

Gelber and Trustee James Hoch countered that the issue was important enough to put on the record through passage of the resolution.

As adopted, the resolution emphasizes the district's location in the Highlands, "the birthplace of the modern environmental movement" — a suggestion from Trustee Jill Lake — and that the board "cares deeply about the quality of the environment today and for future generations."

Besides calling on politicians to address global warming, the board said the district would make it a priority to consider climate change in its own "greenhouse gas emissions, transportation, purchasing, maintenance, landscaping and construction, curriculum development and student engagement."

The Resolution

The Garrison Union Free School is located in the Hudson Highlands, the birthplace of the modern environmental movement. Our community has benefited from the actions of generations of environmentalists in the Hudson Highlands who worked together to preserve land, Storm King Mountain, and the Hudson River.

Whereas there is strong consensus among the global community of climate scientists that human activity is impacting the climate, and

Whereas the members of the Garrison Board of Education cares deeply about the quality of the environment today and for future generations,

We hereby call on local, state and national elected officials to take all actions within their power to implement concrete steps to mitigate climate change.

Here at the Garrison Union Free School, we can take more direct action as it relates to our mandate as a Board of Education and the direction and quality of our children's education. We therefore state it is a priority for the Garrison Union Free School that, to the extent possible, environmental and climate leadership be reflected in our actions, our professional development opportunities for teachers, our curriculum, and our education of children.

We ask that the Superintendent work with the faculty and such other resources as she may deem necessary and appropriate to ensure that the District's operational and educational undertakings reasonably reflect the Board's commitment to environmental and climate leadership.

Such operational and educational undertakings to include, but not necessarily be limited to greenhouse gas emissions, transportation, purchasing, maintenance, landscaping and construction, curriculum development and student engagement.

Much of the early language, such as references to "climate justice" and scientific statements, was removed, reflecting the counsel of DuBois, who suggested that "less is probably more." He expressed concern about including scientific facts, since the board would not be researching their veracity.

Gelber argued the resolution was important because so many institutions ignore global warming. "Politicians don't talk about it, the media doesn't talk about it, your school board doesn't talk

about it and your neighbors don't talk about it, so it can't be that important," he said. "This is essentially a response to that."

O'Rourke said he was skeptical not about climate change but about the fact that the resolution might set a precedent for other community members to ask the board for resolutions addressing other concerns.

"We try to be apolitical," he said on June 11, but global warming "is substantially a political issue. That unfortunately puts us at the top of a slippery slope."

Hoch argued that the board can be political but not partisan. "When we're concerned about opioid addiction, or gun safety, we get political," he said. Gelber added: "I don't think climate change is one issue among many. Someone I work with said, 'If we don't fix the climate, nothing else matters.'"

O'Rourke said of resolutions addressing societal issues in general: "Maybe that's the way this board and all boards are headed, but I think that way madness lies. If someone makes the same propositional argument that this does for climate change [for a cause] that we may not necessarily agree with, we have very little basis for saying no."

By the time of the vote, the board had come up with a draft that, O'Rourke said, "is as close as we're going to get" to agreement, "absent extended conversations over syllables."

Krystal Ford, who attended the July 11 session, was elated after the vote. She told the board she planned to present Garrison's resolution as an example to other districts.



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