

## Topics

# Kids and Clocks

## City Voting Time

Obscured by the glare of the Presidential primaries is an election today that means a great deal to young New Yorkers. The contests are for seats on the nine-member community boards that run the elementary and intermediate schools in the city's 32 districts. There is the usual jockeying among delegates endorsed by the teachers' union, municipal workers' union and other groups fielding candidates. And many of the issues, ethnic rivalries and power struggles are reruns from the last campaign in 1977. But it's plain from the problems confronting the schools that this year's candidates should be measured by a loftier standard.

Mayor Koch's budget for 1981, which contemplates deep reductions in tax levy support for the schools, has yet to be put to bed. Some cuts seem certain and the boards will have to minimize the effect on classroom services. New state competency standards and an end to social promotions will bring added burdens. Class sizes and teaching loads may have to be changed to

keep lagging students from falling hopelessly behind. And there is much the districts can do to help ineffective schools in poor neighborhoods to emulate the more successful ones in similar surroundings. For the children, this can be a most vital vote.



## City Saving Time

There are eight sidewalk clocks left in New York of a type known as the "post clock," usually eight to ten feet tall and made of elaborate cast-iron. Once a common street item, they were installed outside stores, banks and hotels as a kind of advertising and public service. Their large, round faces, with clear Arabic or Roman numerals, were hoisted high on classical columns or at least on decorated bases, suggesting that time and art were intimately related.

Of the eight that remain, there are three on Fifth Avenue and one on Third Avenue in Manhattan; one in Brooklyn and three in Queens. Stately and somber, they have achieved the status of antiquarian urban artifacts

in company with crook-necked lamp-posts and early Beaux Arts subway entrances. The last eight post clocks are scheduled to be considered as New York landmarks, and it seems an excellent fate.

Time does not stand still, of course, and neither does the way one tells it. In the skyscraper age the ornate sidewalk clock was replaced by the electric clock, lodged high on new buildings, and New Yorkers learned to raise their eyes to flashing numerals, time and temperature: a quick fix on the day. Then came the blinking computer numbers that now surround our lives.

The cast-iron street clock told time with dignity, authority and art. The computer clock does it with split-second accuracy. But all New York clocks have one special function in common — they not only tell us what time it is, but where we are. That kind of daily reassurance, in a city committed to change, is as necessary as a morning coffee break or a long look out the window in the afternoon. Clocks are landmarks because they give the city and its citizens a sense of time and place.