

## Thumbs up, thumbs down

By the Editorial  
Board

Thumbs up to **Central Unified School District Superintendent Mike Berg** for commissioning a mural by local artist Will Portis depicting the opportunities for district students. The mural is on the south wall of the district office at 5652 W Gettysburg Ave. There are images of students in agriculture, career technical education, dance, math and science, drama, music, robotics and Future Farmers of America competition. The mural captures the district's core values and the area's agricultural heritage. Said Berg, who is retiring at the end of 2015: "It's a piece I'm very proud of as it depicts my tenure's work in Central."

Thumbs up to Central West High School freshman **Jimmy Xiong**, now the proud owner of a 2015 Toyota Corolla, thanks to his 4.0 grade-point average. He is among more than 7,000 students who were entered in a raffle for \$60,000 in scholarships. Jimmy, however, got the grand prize of a car. At age 14, Jimmy cannot drive yet, but when he's ready in a couple of years, he will be all set to drive to college in style.

Thumbs up to **Fayyaz Ahamed**, a 16-year-old senior at [University High School](#), for earning a perfect score of 2400 on the SAT and a 36 on the ACT on his first try. It's a rare accomplishment, with only 0.03 percent of the 1.7 million students who took the SAT earning a 2400. About 0.08 percent of the 1.9 million students who took the ACT earned a composite score of 36. Fayyaz keeps a 4.25 GPA, takes five advanced placement courses, two Fresno State courses and a lab. Fayyaz used online test services and textbooks with practice exams for his preparation. He plans to study medicine.

Thumbs up to **Fresno City Hall** for fast-tracking the replacement of burned playground equipment at Romain Park. The city cut a check for \$196,212.25 up front to the company that is building the equipment. A city spokesman says that the new playground will be in place by Nov. 20.

Thumbs up to the **generous guests at the Central California Women's Conference** for contributing to a good cause at the recent luncheon. The organized passed the hat to alleviate hunger and \$20,000 was raised for the effort. Excellent. There will be some nice holiday meals given away in the next few months thanks to this above-and-beyond contribution.

Thumbs up to **Fresno State's Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship** for partnering up with [The Arc of Fresno and Madera Unified School District](#) to improve the [Kids Invent!](#) program. The Arc teaches individuals with developmental disabilities to attain greater independence. The Arc will streamline production of Kids Invent! activity kits, which provides all supplies necessary for students to design and build prototypes each week. Within the Kids Invent! framework, students work in teams to explore solutions to practical problems through teamwork, observation and experimentation. The curriculum has students start by building straw towers and work up to designing an amphibious vehicle. Through these tasks, students learn to use supplies, manage time and collaborate. The workplace definitely needs employees with these talents.

Thumbs up to the **James Irvine Foundation** for selecting the Fresno Grand Opera to receive a \$200,000 grant to reach new audiences. The grant will support work over the next two seasons in engaging new audiences through participatory creative programs. The grant was awarded jointly to Fresno Grand Opera and [Townsend Opera in Modesto](#), which joined administrative forces in 2014. Fresno audiences will get a taste of the company's innovative programming Oct. 16 with "[Opera Remix: Music & Verse](#)," it will present the central San Joaquin Valley premiere of Philip Glass and Allen Ginsberg's "[Hydrogen Jukebox](#)" along with performances of original work by local poets led by [Michael Medrano](#), [Bryan Medina](#) and James Tyner. The evening is the first partnership in a new collaboration between Fresno Grand Opera, the Fresno State Department of Music and the Fresno poetry community.

Thumbs up to the **local folks recently honored by public broadcasting** for their support of students on the path to graduation. The ceremony was part of the national American Graduate Initiative, an annual event held by public broadcasting stations across the country, highlighting innovative programs, ideas and caring adults making graduation possible for at-risk youths. ValleyPBS selected four local Champions and produced videos featuring their stories and efforts to help students in the Valley. Selected as Champions were Dr. Brett Taylor, innovator of student programs and principal of the new Phillip J. Patiño School of Entrepreneurship in Fresno; Marilyn Holt, retired social worker and foster parent, who fostered 98 children and now volunteers as a foster grandparent helping children struggling with reading and writing skills; and Jessica Nazaroff and Shelby Dart, founders of local nonprofit Feed Our Future, providing children from two local high-needs schools with weekly bags of groceries, so their families will have nutritious food on weekends. The videos are online at [valleypbs.org](http://valleypbs.org).