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### Acceptance takes centre stage in Surrey



Students from Panorama Ridge Secondary (above) perform a dance during the BIG IDEAS event at the Bell Performing Arts Centre May 21. Several Surrey schools participated in the event, including David Brankin Elementary and Princess Margaret Secondary (below). EVAN SEAL / THE LEADER — Image Credit: Evan Seal / The Leader



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by [Sheila Reynolds - Surrey North Delta Leader](#)  
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“Girls have to be pretty.”

“Boys have to be strong.”

“Girls must be polite.”

“Boys have muscles.”

As the words were read, Grade 4 and 5 students from Simon Cunningham Elementary danced on the Bell Performing Arts Centre stage last week, exploring the

array of gender stereotypes common in society. At the end, they shouted “Diversity is our strength!”

The afternoon, which featured about 500 students from several Surrey and White Rock schools, spotlighted drama, song, dance and artwork geared toward education and social change, with a theme of “Personal Identity and Embracing Uniqueness.”



Singers from Princess Margaret Secondary got the crowd

pumped up with songs such as “Brave,” “I’m Not Perfect” and “Bulletproof,” while kids from David Brankin Elementary let their “freak flag fly,” waving coloured banners with printed words – like dance, love of animals and archery – stating what they’re proud of.

The showcase, called the Vancouver Biennale BIG IDEAS Celebration, was sparked by Surrey School District’s regulation promoting inclusion and acceptance of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Collaborative drama presentations by Maple Green, White Rock and David Brankin Elementary schools explored complex themes such as arranged marriage and immigration, while dancers from Panorama Ridge examined the emotional effects when a student’s gender doesn’t present as the stereotype dictates.

George Greenaway Elementary students carried lanterns on stage, each stating “what makes them light up.” While some kids said their passion was found in various sports, others pointed to inspirational quotes, moments with their parents or a favourite band.

Classroom teachers and professional artists worked with students prior to the May 21 show. The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charity that celebrates art in public space with a mandate of using art for a catalyst for learning and social engagement.



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