

Press Clippings - 6/5/2023

– **Daily Herald** –

Change in the air for Elgin Partnership for Early Learning as its celebrates 10th year

June 2, 2023

By Rick West



*Aileen Moreno, left, peeks over as friend Melanie Aguirre laughs at a book passage during a read-along at the Elgin Partnership for Early Learning's Learning On the Go visit at **Century Oaks Elementary** in Elgin last summer. The 2023 program begins next week. Rick West | Staff Photographer/2022*

Elgin Partnership for Early Learning is poised to celebrate its 10th anniversary with a change the group hopes will help it grow and prepare more area children for kindergarten.

The organization, which works to ensure that children 5 years old and younger have access to quality early care and education in Elgin and the surrounding communities, recently received 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.

"We feel like we have enough community partners and funding in place to be able to stand alone, which will open the door for us to apply for additional funding to expand our services," she said.

EPEL was formed to improve readiness scores for **Elgin Area School District U-46 kindergartners**. Its work through the years has been reflected in the improved readiness scores, which have gone up from 10% in 2017 to 24% in 2022, according to reports from

the Illinois School Board of Education.

Peters said the group is working to branch out beyond Elgin to the rest of the communities that make up U-46. About half of the 18,000 children 5 years old and younger within the borders of U-46 live outside Elgin.

"We have spent a lot of our time in Elgin because of the need of our families," she said. "But we've spent the last five or six years trying to build relationships with partners in the other 10 communities that U-46 serves."

One EPEL effort reaching out to kids in Hanover Park is its summer Learning on the Go program, which begins next week. The two-month program provides family engagement and early learning opportunities for young children directly in neighborhoods.

The events educate through play, storytime and crafts. Participating children also can check out books from the Gail Borden or Poplar Creek libraries' bookmobiles.

The free, bilingual program begins its seventh year with nine sites, up one from last year, including six in Elgin and three in Hanover Park. Peters said it's a great opportunity to help kids learn and educate parents on what resources are available.

"We want to change the system to make it an 'easy button' for families to get access to what they need to have their children prepared for kindergarten and close that school readiness gap," she said.

For more information about the Learning on the Go program, visit elginpartnership.org.

– Daily Herald – Elgin Hispanic Network honors 2023 high school scholars at ceremony

June 2, 2023



*The Elgin Hispanic Network named five 2023 Elgin Hispanic Network High School Scholars: from left, **Xitxlally Chavez and Andrea Jimenez, both of Elgin High; Camila Ramirez Guillen, Larkin High School; Stephanie Pedroza, South Elgin High; and Diego Valdivia, Elgin High.** Courtesy of Elgin Hispanic Network*

The Elgin Hispanic Network, in collaboration with Que Crees?, a Colombian/Mexican-infused restaurant in downtown Elgin, celebrated the induction of its 2023 Elgin Hispanic Network High School Scholars at a May 26 ceremony.

The event brought together Elgin Hispanic Network board members, donors, scholars, and their families to recognize the outstanding achievements and potential of the newly inducted scholars.

The scholarship committee carefully selected five exceptional high school seniors out of numerous applications for their demonstrated leadership skills, community service, and talent.

Maria Borrero, awards chair of the Elgin Hispanic Network, expressed her admiration for the scholars, stating, "(The Scholarship Committee) selected five very different high school seniors out of over a dozen applications because they displayed a unique sense of leadership, community service skill set, and talent. Let this be an example that Latino/Hispanic excellence is very present in Elgin."

The Elgin Hispanic Network is proud to present the following students as the 2023 Elgin Hispanic Network High School Scholars:

- **Xitxlally Chavez, Elgin High School**
- **Camila Ramirez Guillen, Larkin High School**

- Andrea Jimenez, Elgin High School
- Stephanie Pedroza, South Elgin High School
- Diego Valdivia, Elgin High School

Each scholar's achievements were highlighted during the ceremony, showcasing their academic excellence, extracurricular involvement, leadership roles, and commitment to community service.

Xitxlally Chavez, a dedicated student from Elgin High School, has demonstrated remarkable academic performance while actively participating in sports and various volunteer activities.

Camila Ramirez Guillen, an involved student at Larkin High School, excels in athletics, music, and community service.

Andrea Jimenez, from Elgin High School, has consistently achieved academic excellence while actively participating in extracurricular activities and community service.

Stephanie Pedroza, from South Elgin High School, has shown remarkable dedication to various community roles and activities, contributing to the empowerment of underrepresented students.

Diego Valdivia, a gifted student from Elgin High School, has excelled academically, and athletically, and contributed to volunteer work throughout his high school and college years.

The Elgin Hispanic Network Scholarships were made possible by the generous support of the Seigle Foundation, and EHN members: Mark and Robin Seigle, founders of Seigle's Cabinet Center, deeply rooted in the Elgin-Dundee communities, are committed to making a positive impact in the region. Their philanthropic efforts aim to transform lives and enhance the quality of life in Elgin and Dundee, while also ensuring the success and stability of the nonprofits involved.

Karina Nava, assistant city manager of the City of Elgin and a Seigle Foundation board member, expressed her gratitude, saying, "I received a similar community scholarship when I graduated from Elgin High School, and I know the firsthand difference it can make for a first-generation student and their family. Thanks to the generosity of the Seigle Foundation, I have the opportunity to give back to the community that helped me achieve my goals."

The Elgin Hispanic Network and the Seigle Foundation continue to empower and support deserving students, showcasing the vibrant Latino/Hispanic excellence within

the Elgin community.

For more information about the Elgin Hispanic Network and its programs, visit www.elginhispanicnetwork.org.

– Daily Herald – South Elgin student deprived of wearing Hispanic honor sash at graduation wants to ensure it doesn't happen again

June 4, 2023

By Gloria Casas



Stephanie Pedroza was not allowed to wear a stole representing the Elgin Hispanic Network scholarship she received, a decision she says was wrongly made by a school dean just before the start of South Elgin High School's May 27 graduation ceremony. (Stephanie Pedroza/HANDOUT)

When South Elgin High School student Stephanie Pedroza earned a scholarship from the Elgin Hispanic Network, she received a stole to wear around her neck at graduation.

“It was something I was really excited to wear. I earned it. I was the top recipient. I was super proud,” Pedroza said.

But it was an honor she was denied when a school dean told her to remove it prior to the May 27 ceremony, she said. He took the sash away from her, she added.

“We were in line outside of the Now Arena where the graduation was being held. One of the deans came up to me and said, ‘Hey, I need to let you know you are now allowed to wear that. I’m sorry. The district has a strict policy.’”

“I was kind of taken aback because a lot of people were wearing them. They never said there was an issue with it,” Pedroza said.

She informed the dean that it represented an academic achievement, and she wanted it back.

“At the end of the day, I still got to walk on stage. I think it would have been a lot better if I got to wear it,” Pedroza said.

School District U-46 spokeswoman Karla Jimenez said the district gives high school officials discretion to set guidelines for graduation ceremonies, including whether students can wear stoles, sashes or cords not issued by the school or district.

Students at South Elgin typically are allowed to wear them but only if they obtain permission from school administration prior to graduation day, Jimenez said.

“U-46 understands our students increasingly want to express their individuality on graduation day, and our schools and administrators are trying to navigate this desire while also ensuring our graduation ceremonies are respectful and joyous for all,” she said.

Pedroza said doesn’t remember being told she had to receive permission to wear the stole. Other students had similar neckwear reflecting their academic accomplishments and heritage, and some started hiding them when they realized the dean was taking them away, she said.

“I thought there would be no issue,” she said.

It’s important for students to embrace their heritage, Pedroza said, and in her case, she’s especially proud to be a first generation Mexican American to graduate high school and the first in her family to attend college. She’ll start at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in the fall.

During her time in high school, she was an advocate for underrepresented students at South Elgin because the school was predominantly white when she first started.

She helped found a group called the Future of South Elgin, an organization focused on creating a safe and inclusive environment for underrepresented students, and was part of the school’s Racial Inclusion Support and Equity Committee.

She said she believes the school has made a lot of positive changes in that area.

“I was disappointed that we have these organizations at school that try to make kids feel included and try to support equity and those missions, then something like this happens

on graduation,” Pedroza said.

What she wants to ensure is the same thing doesn’t happen again next year, she said.

U-46 has a graduation committee made up of district representatives and administrators from each district high school, Jimenez said.

“This topic will be brought up for discussion as the committee meets to plan graduation ceremonies for the Class of 2024,” she said.