

# Press Clippings - 6/12/2023

## – Daily Herald –

### How a South Elgin graduate is moving beyond a marred moment



*South Elgin High School alum Stephanie Pedroza was asked to remove a graduation stole provided to her by the Elgin Hispanic Network. Now she hopes to use her experience to help other students honor their cultures during school ceremonies. Courtesy of Stephanie Pedroza*

**June 9, 2023**

**By Alicia Fabbre**

Graduation didn't go as expected for **South Elgin High School alum Stephanie Pedroza**, but that's not stopping her from using her high school experiences to help others.

Moments before she was set to walk across the stage at graduation, Pedroza was asked by a dean to remove a stole provided to her by the Elgin Hispanic Network. The stole recognized Pedroza as the organization's top scholarship recipient and for her Mexican heritage.

According to **Elgin Area School District U-46** policy, students can wear stoles or cords not provided by the district, but only if they get permission first.

Pedroza, who did not wear the stole from the Elgin Hispanic Network, said she was not aware of the policy.

According to Pedroza, the dean collected a handful of stoles that day, and other students hid their stoles under their graduation gowns when they realized what was happening.

Though the incident was disappointing, Pedroza said there was no ill intent. She wants to move forward and is focused on her future and helping other students like her.

"There should be a program to help all students reach higher education," said Pedroza, who started the Future South Elgin Club while in high school. "I think it's really important to continue to encourage students.

"I hope that the district, moving forward, brings more awareness to their first-generation student demographic," said Pedroza, who will attend the University of Illinois in the fall.

She also is optimistic that a state bill, co-sponsored by state Sen. Cristina Castro, an Elgin Democrat representing the 22nd District, will help prevent future incidents like hers. Before graduation, Pedroza landed a job in Castro's office as a summer intern.

"The irony of this is that once this bill is in place, this controversy should not exist anymore," Castro said.

The bill, which awaits the governor's signature, would "prohibit public and charter schools from prohibiting a student from wearing clothing that has cultural, ethnic or religious significance" at school or graduation ceremonies.

State Sen. Suzy Glowiak Hilton, a Western Springs Democrat who represents the 23rd District, introduced the legislation earlier this year following a similar case, Castro said.

Castro, who formerly served on the Elgin Hispanic Network, and Pedroza credited **U-46** for its response.

During a board meeting this week, **Superintendent Suzanne Johnson** issued an apology and pledged that the district's graduation committee would review the incident as well as the district's policies for graduation.

"We are committed to ensuring that similar situations do not occur in the future," Johnson said in a statement. "It is essential to emphasize that our school district acknowledges the importance of supporting and allowing students to express their individuality and highlight achievements while maintaining a respectful and inclusive graduation ceremony."

## **– Elgin Courier News – Elgin News Digest: ECC Project Backpack to provide supplies to local students; 100 Elgin-area students, families receive free computers; Elgin’s Larkin Place honored by Congress of New Urbanism**

**June 9, 2023**

**By Mike Danahey - The Courier-News**

### **ECC Project Backpack to provide supplies to local students**

Elgin Community College and its partners are collecting school supplies for Project Backpack to be provided to area students in need attending **Elgin-area schools** and ECC in the fall.

Supply kits, including backpacks, will be provided to local school districts for distribution at their discretion prior to the start of the school year, a news release said.

For ECC students, supplies will be distributed while supplies last from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 1, in Spartan Pantry, Building B, Room B175, on the Elgin campus. Any kits that remain will be available after that from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m Monday through Thursday at the pantry, the release said.

For more information, see [project-backpack.org](http://project-backpack.org).

### **100 Elgin-area students, families receive free computers**

Through a donation AT&T made to nonprofit Compudopt, 100 **Elgin-area students** now have new laptop computers.

The devices were given to families in need at the Boys & Girls Club of Elgin's South Elgin facility, a news release said. The donation was made as part of AT&T's commitment to help bridge the digital divide.

Compudopt "provides technology access and education to under-resourced youth and their communities," according to its website.

To read the full article, [click here](#).