

# Backus school defamation suit can go forward

## State Court of Appeals overturned dismissal of case

**BY TRAVIS GRIMLER**  
Echo Journal

**BACKUS** — In 2024, former Foothills Christian Academy student

Rebecca-Kay Hamson and family saw a district court dismiss their defamation lawsuit against former Principal and Pastor Blair Ecker.

On Oct. 20, The Minnesota Court of Appeals reversed the dismissal, allowing the suit to continue.

Hamson alleges that

Ecker held a meeting to investigate a cheating and grade-changing incident at the school in 2022, where students at the school manipulated

grades via access to the computer grade system.

According to documents from the court case, in the process of questioning other students, Ecker allegedly made defamatory statements about Hamson, referring to her as

the ring leader of the plan and being “somebody with poor IQ” and “a special ed.”

Ecker also allegedly claimed Hamson had been expelled.

**DEFAMATION on A6**

brate Crosslake Award banquet because she bid to host the event at Whitefish Lodge.

She won the bid, but no longer will have to work at the event since she'll be there as a person of honor.

Koski was born in the Twin Cities and moved to Pequot Lakes as a young girl. When she was in third grade, her

"That was the plan until Kista Brunkhorst, my boss and the owner, called me to talk about an opportunity," Koski said.

Koski's grandmother worked in the house-keeping department at Whitefish Lodge and told Brunkhorst she should hire her granddaughter.

That was 18 years ago.

Brunkhorst said: "Her ability to juggle sales, operations, events,

restaurant, she enjoys talking to the locals and regulars. With weddings

wedding, for Jamaica. But they did have a large celebra-

vogt@pineandlakes.com. Follow her on Facebook.

# HUNTER'S SUPPER

November 8, 2025

5:00PM - 7:00PM



DONATE TO

Christmas for Kids

# DEFAMATION

CONTINUED from A1

Documents show that Hamson's mother removed her from the school, and she was not expelled.

Ecker does not refute that he made the related statements, but his legal defense alleges the statements were immune from prosecution.

The case was initially dismissed because the Cass County District Court judge decided Ecker's statements were

protected from prosecution because they were meant as a tactic to elicit more information from other students.

Hamson argued Ecker's statements were not privileged because the statements were not in good faith, on a proper occasion, with a proper motive or with reasonable or probable cause.

Hamson's defense alleges the statements were made to cover up the long-term cheating scandal and possible foreknowledge of the

cheating and circumstances that made it possible, thus making the statements not qualify for the "good faith" argument.

An appeals court statement by Judge JaPaul Harris said: "Because there is a genuine issue of material fact as to whether the qualified privilege operates to defeat the defamation claim, we determine that the district court erred by granting summary judgment in favor of respondents. Accordingly, we

reverse and remand."

Furthermore, the appeals court said that only a jury could determine the presence of malice in the statements.

Hamson has admitted to participating in the grade-changing scheme. At issue are the statements about Hamson's academic abilities.

The appeal says: "(Hamson) asserted that Ecker made these statements 'knowing they were false.' And she further alleged that the statements were 'repeated

throughout the community,' and had a 'severe and negative impact' on her wellbeing."

Foothills Christian Academy in Backus is not currently active, having closed before the 2025-2026 school year due in part to enrollment. Ecker resigned from positions with the school before the closure.

Travis Grimler, Echo Journal staff writer, may be reached at 218-855-5853 or [travis.grimler@pineandlakes.com](mailto:travis.grimler@pineandlakes.com). Follow him on Facebook.

**BURGLARY:** Report Oct. 23 of an individual inside a vacant residence on Norway Avenue. An officer responded and found an individual inside who had been arrested six days earlier for burglarizing the same residence. The officer took the individual into custody and transported them to the Cass County Detention Center.

### **Crow Wing County Sheriff's Department**

**CRASHES:** Report at 1:35 p.m. Oct. 21 of a driving under the influence crash on County Road 1 in Emily.

Report at 8:37 a.m. Oct. 21 of assisting another agency with a

## **on land use ordinance revisions**

**BRAINERD** — The Crow Wing County Land Services Department seeks public comments on proposed revisions to the county land use ordinance.

View the ordinance revisions and supporting information on the county website at [www.crowwing.gov/214/Ordinance-Policy](http://www.crowwing.gov/214/Ordinance-Policy).

Written comments on the proposed changes will be accepted until Nov. 21

- Article 2: General Zoning Provisions
- Article 8: Variances and Appeals of Administrative Decisions
- Article 9: Subdivision of Land
- Article 11: Shoreland District Standards
- Article 37: Subsurface Sewage Treatment

Systems Technical Standards and Criteria

- Article 46: Definitions
- Contact the Land Services Office at 218-824-1010 or [landservices@crowwing.gov](mailto:landservices@crowwing.gov) to discuss land use activities. Find Crow Wing County information and resources at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).



DISCOVER THE  
**WORLD**  
AROUND YOU!

**START HERE:**  
[NORTHLANDOUTDOORS.COM](http://NORTHLANDOUTDOORS.COM)

