

# The most damning parts of the 'Daily Beast's explosive Nicholas Sparks exposé

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In a [bombshell report](#) for the *Daily Beast*, [journalist Tarpley Hitt](#) detailed what appears to be a disturbing pattern of discriminatory behavior at the mega-selling author's Christian academy.

Sparks, whose glossy doomed-romance output has spawned 20 best-selling novels and 11 treacly films, established the Epiphany School of Global Studies in an enclave of North Carolina 13 years ago. Since 2014, however, Sparks and his school have been involved in a protracted legal battle with former headmaster and CEO Saul Benjamin over allegations of harassment, racism, and homophobia. Benjamin started working at Epiphany in 2013 and lasted a turbulent 98 days. One year later, he filed a lawsuit against Sparks and the Board, seeking punitive damages for "discrimination, breach of contract, emotional distress, and defamation."

The case is scheduled for a trial in August. In the meantime, Hitt's piece has some startling revelations based on emails that emerged during the discovery phase. The report is worth reading [in its entirety](#), but here's a CliffsNotes version with the most damning details.

- **Sparks appears to have actively discouraged teaching inclusivity around homosexuality.** The author upbraided Benjamin for "what some perceive as an agenda that strives to make homosexuality open and accepted" and complained about the former headmaster's "misplaced priorities at the school level (GLBT [sic], diversity, the beauty of other religions, as opposed to academic/curricular/global issues, Christian traditions, etc.)." A Board of Trustees member also claimed at a board meeting that Benjamin was "promoting a homosexual culture and agenda."
- **Sparks claimed Benjamin secretly authorized a "gay club," which his board tried to ban.** After students independently began to meet up and discuss issues around their sexuality and identity, a spate of complaints and bullying ensued. Two student sons of Epiphany school administrators, a son of an "influential Epiphany parent," and the vice president of the Student Senate allegedly began discussing a "homo-caust." In an email, Sparks wrote, "The school does NOT, nor has it EVER, discriminated. Not allowing them admittance is discrimination. Not allowing them to have a club is NOT discrimination."
- **Sparks allegedly wanted to ban student protest at the school.** The motion was in direct response to two LGBT students planning to announce their orientation during chapel (while nude).
- **Sparks allegedly spread rumors that Benjamin had a mental disorder.** In one of Sparks's emails, the author outlines a case for diagnosing the former headmaster,

“citing forgetfulness and an ‘obsession’ with what he characterizes as ‘non-relevant’ issues.”

- **The Epiphany School allegedly had racial issues as well.** Benjamin claims he had been concerned that just two black students were enrolled in the school during his tenure. When he raised these issues with the board, he was summarily rebuffed. “In one incident, alleged in Benjamin’s complaint,” Hitt writes, “Sparks allegedly attributed the school’s dearth of black students to the fact that they are ‘too poor and can’t do the academic work.’ . . . In another, Tracey Lorentzen, a member of Epiphany’s Board of Trustees and a defendant in the case, claimed she often drives 35 miles away to shop at the Walmart in Havelock, North Carolina. ‘Only black people work at the New Bern Walmart,’ she allegedly said, rendering the facility ‘dirty’; the Havelock location better suited her since ‘white people staff that store.’” Sparks allegedly also chided Benjamin for appearing at an event with the president of a local NAACP chapter, as the public association brought “disrepute” to the school.
- **Sparks is very bad at defending his school’s issues with diversity and tolerance.** In a message to Benjamin in November 2013, Sparks wrote, “Regarding diversity, I’ve now told you half a dozen times that our lack of diversity has NOTHING to do with the school or anyone at the school. It’s not because of what we as a school has or hasn’t done. It has nothing to do with racism or vestiges of Jim Crow. It comes down to 1) Money and 2) Culture.” In the same message, Sparks boasted about Epiphany as a model of acceptance, citing as proof the fact that the school’s first student was Jewish.

Read the entire report [here](#).