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[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** As campaigning toward Election Day reaches a fever pitch and most of the world is talking about it. In nearly half of Wisconsin's schools, teachers are being restricted from discussing U.S. elections. The Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies is pushing back its president and Shorewood Middle School social studies teacher and 2023 teacher of the year. Sarah Caplan is here, and thanks very much for being here.

[00:00:48] **Speaker 2** Thank you for having me.

[00:00:49] **Speaker 1** So your council conducted a survey of teachers on this. What did that survey find?

[00:00:56] **Speaker 2** So we have a monthly newsletter that we send to our membership. And, full disclosure, we don't have every teacher in the state of Wisconsin who does teach social study as members of our organization. Currently, we are working to change that, though. But 42% of the respondents, in our membership who filled out the survey so that they've experienced, scenarios where their district administration, so either their principal, or perhaps even their school board has placed limitations upon them for, teaching of current events or the election in this upcoming school year. Also, I was recently at the, Teaching about Elections conference at UW Madison, and, a reporter asked the crowd of educators if they had experienced such, things in their districts, and every hand in the crowd went up. There was well over 100 educate there. So this is something that we see as an organization. We also asked a similar question at our conference last March, and received that type of overwhelming response.

[00:01:59] **Speaker 1** So what is behind the restrictions and complaints on the part of parents say?

[00:02:06] **Speaker 2** So the things that we hear from educators around our state in terms of parent complaints are our teachers are conducting, units of study where students are learning about how elections work. You know, how votes are cast and counted, how the electoral, electoral college process works. And parents are hearing from their students that when they come home that this type of topic is being discussed and then immediately complained to principals or school board members that their children are being indoctrinated with political ideology. So that's something we've heard a lot of. And this is not a scenario where an educator is talking about their, Partizan politics. It's just simply giving students opportunities in classrooms to learn about how our democratic system works. We also have heard from educators that have had, administrators that will just say to them, we don't want you having any discussions in your classrooms about the election at all, or any classroom discussions about current events. It's too controversial. We don't want parent complaints. Which makes it very difficult for social studies educators when this is related to our state standards and also partially related to some of the statutory requirements that we have in Wisconsin to teach social studies.

[00:03:26] **Speaker 1** So our teachers pushing a political agenda, in any case in classrooms.

[00:03:33] **Speaker 2** So I have yet to come across an educator that tells their students what their political agenda is. You know, as an educator, you are bound by policies in your school district. Where most districts have similar policies that they purchase, from an, policy writing consortium. And it basically says that as an educator, you should not give any partizan political viewpoints in your classroom. But simply talking about politics, how politics work, or what issues are taking place in our political sphere is enough in the current, political atmosphere to make parents and administrators feel like something wrong or nefarious is going on in the classroom. The term of indoctrination is thrown around quite frequently. I have yet to find an educator, though that is telling any of their students their political ideology.

[00:04:25] **Speaker 1** Are these restrictions happening in your own district?

[00:04:29] **Speaker 2** They're not happening in my district. I feel pretty fortunate to teach in a district where not only the community, but our school board and our district administrators at the building levels have been very supportive of social studies education. They have been supportive of us meeting our state standards, which required to student students to engage in their own inquiry and also to engage in developing civil discourse skills. So, learning about current events and having current events discussions, learning about the election is something that is valued in the school district that I work in.

[00:05:01] **Speaker 1** And in your mind, why is it important for students to learn about government and elections?

[00:05:09] **Speaker 2** Well, our state legislature believes that it is. There's a statute that actually talks about how important that is and that requires that to happen. That school board should provide, an educational plan for that to take place in the school districts. It's also part of our state's standards. But more importantly, I think it's really important for the future of our democracy that our students understand how our government works. You know, what are the parts of our government? What are their powers and limitations? What are the rights and responsibilities that citizens have in this country? And, with that being said, how as a person who's part of your community, or if you are a citizen as well, how do you engage, to ensure that you are making a positive impact on your neighbors? And how can you have a voice to be somebody who is civically engaged? One of our state standards says that Wisconsin student students will learn how to be civically engaged. And that's really important because we want our future generations to be able to be strong leaders, strong problem solvers, and people that will strengthen and improve the democracy in the country that we have, that we have here.

[00:06:20] **Speaker 1** We leave it there. Sarah Kaplan, thanks very much.

[00:06:24] **Speaker 2** Thank you.