

# **What Teachers Really Do in the Classroom and Factors That Influence Their Decisions**

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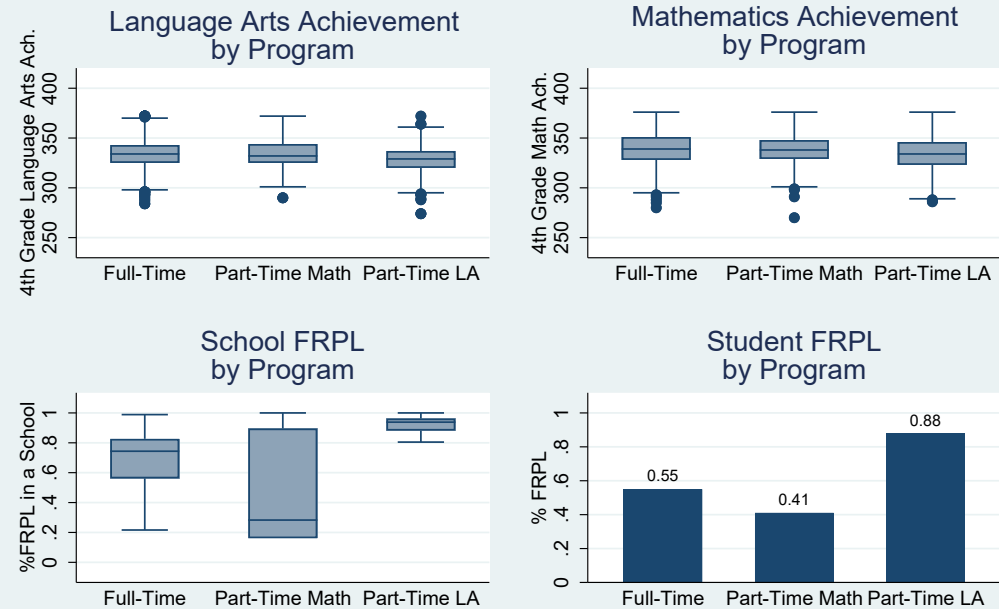
**NCRGE's First Five Years:  
Results, Reflections, and Recommendations**

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# NCRGE Phase II Findings

No difference in reading and mathematics achievement across types of gifted program offerings after controlling for the number of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

Program Characteristics for Cohort 1, 4th Grade



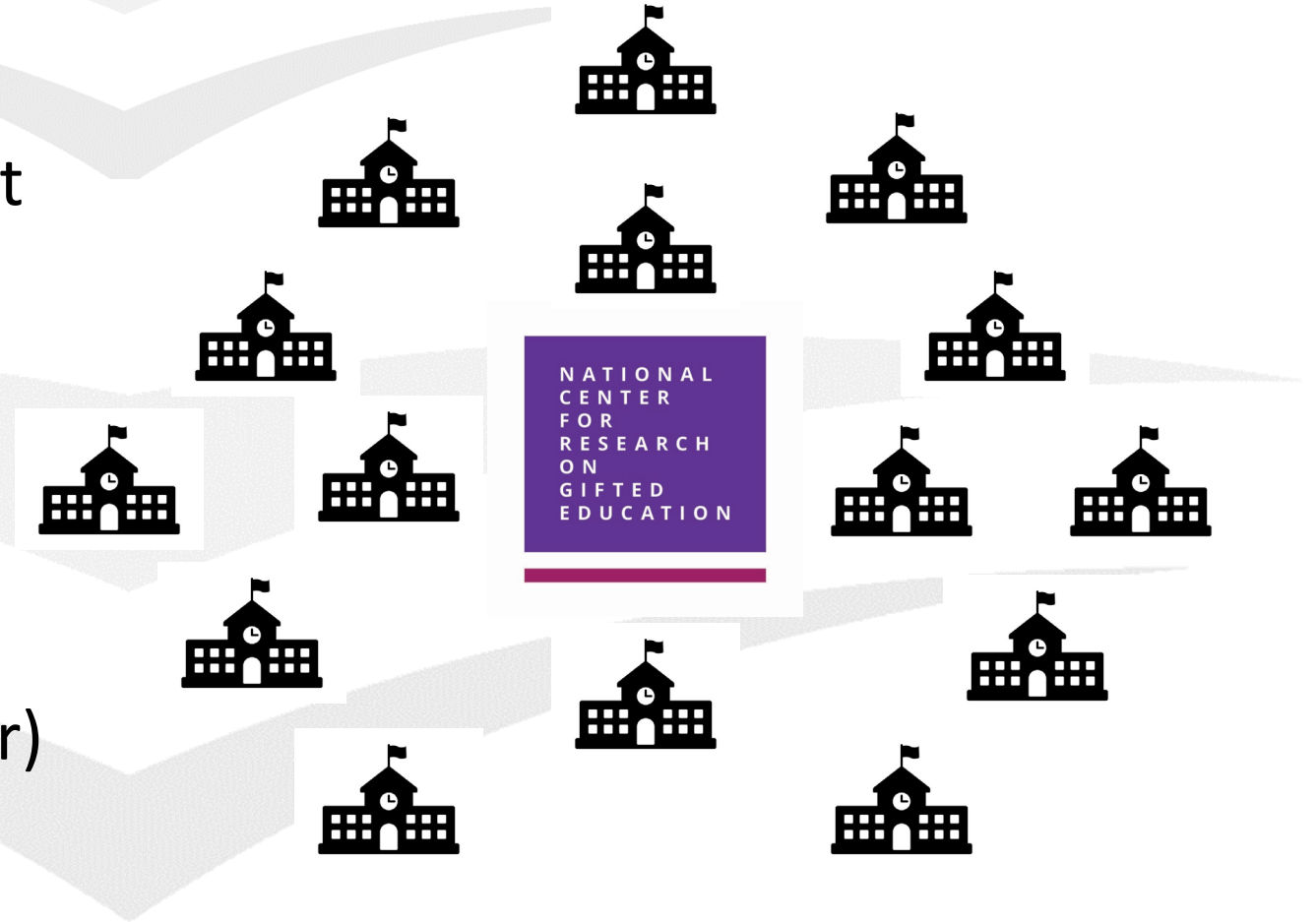
# Phase II Qualitative Study

## Site Visits

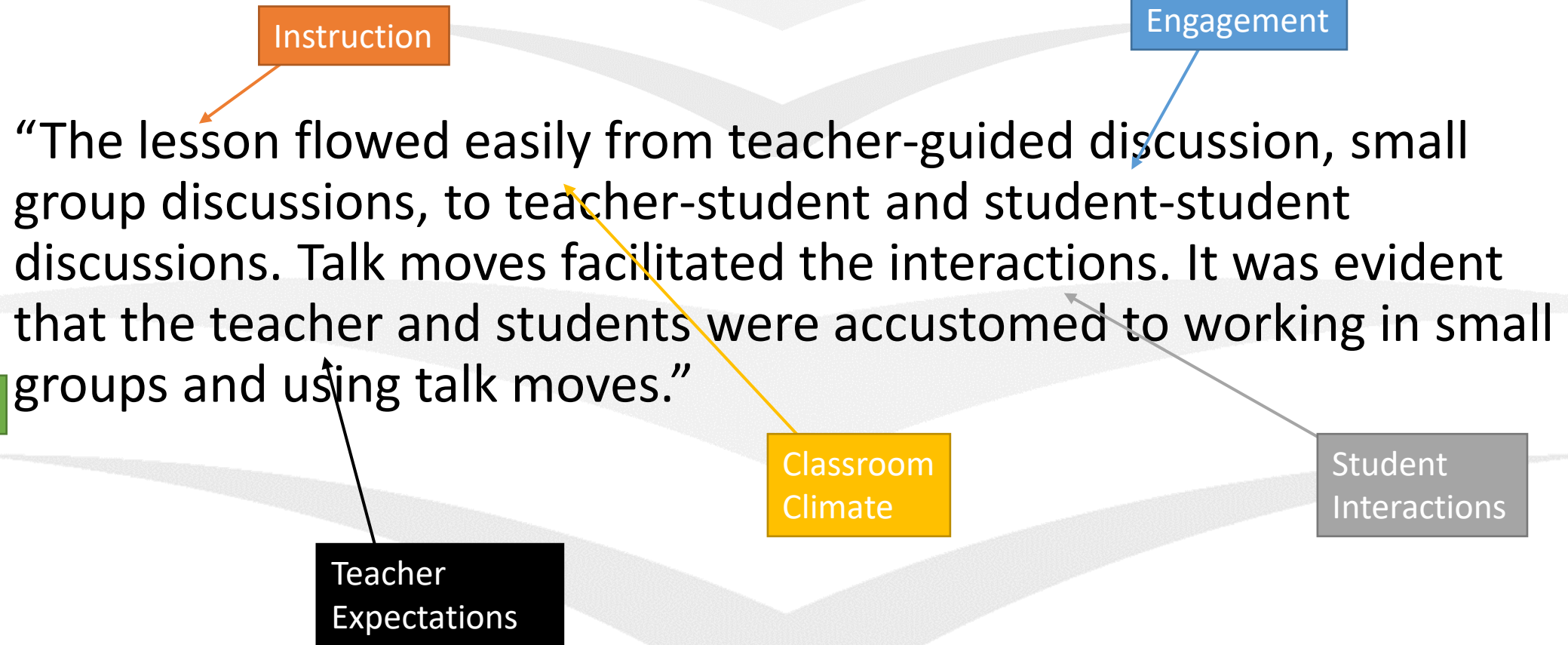
- One large, urban school district
- 15 schools

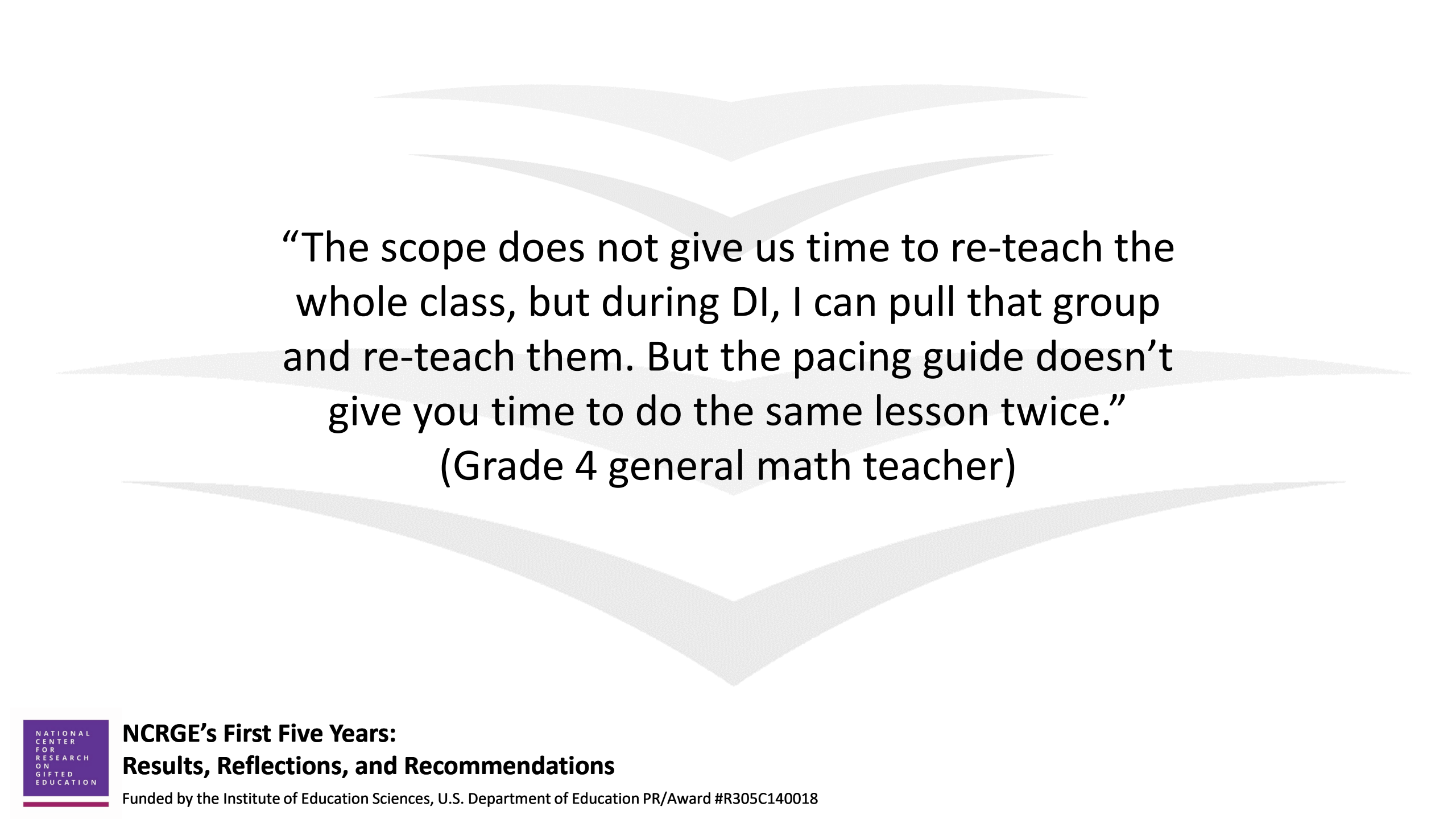
## Data Collection

- 87 Teacher interviews
- 148 Classroom observations  
(1-2 observations per teacher)
- 16 Administrator interviews



# Phase II Qualitative Analysis



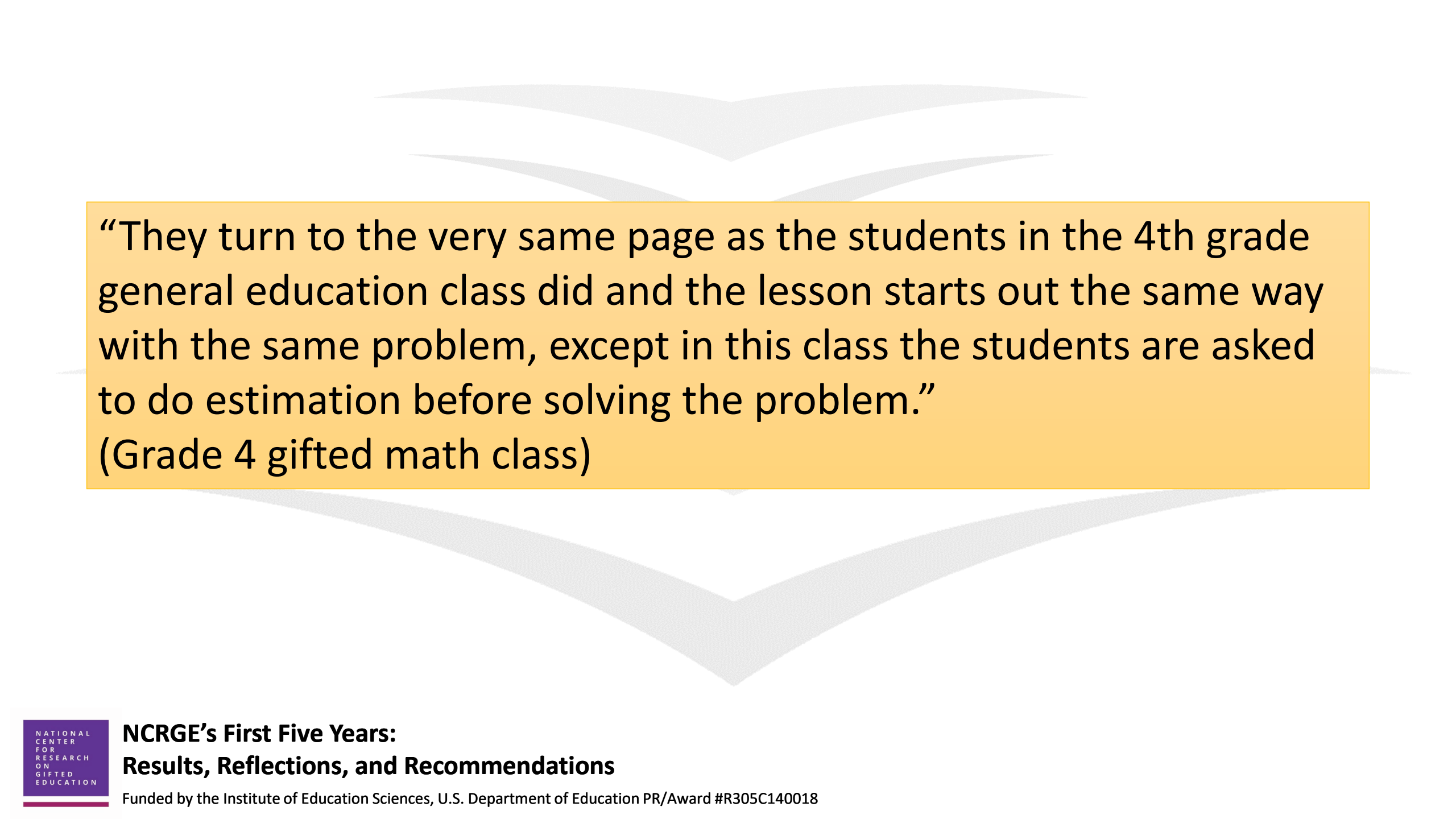


“The scope does not give us time to re-teach the whole class, but during DI, I can pull that group and re-teach them. But the pacing guide doesn’t give you time to do the same lesson twice.”  
(Grade 4 general math teacher)



# Teacher Autonomy

- Autonomy: making independent decisions
- Research Questions:
  - What are elementary teachers' perceptions of autonomy as they pertain to using pacing guides?
  - Is there variation in these perceptions?
  - Does the reported enactment of these teachers' autonomy differ according to their perceptions?



“They turn to the very same page as the students in the 4th grade general education class did and the lesson starts out the same way with the same problem, except in this class the students are asked to do estimation before solving the problem.”  
(Grade 4 gifted math class)

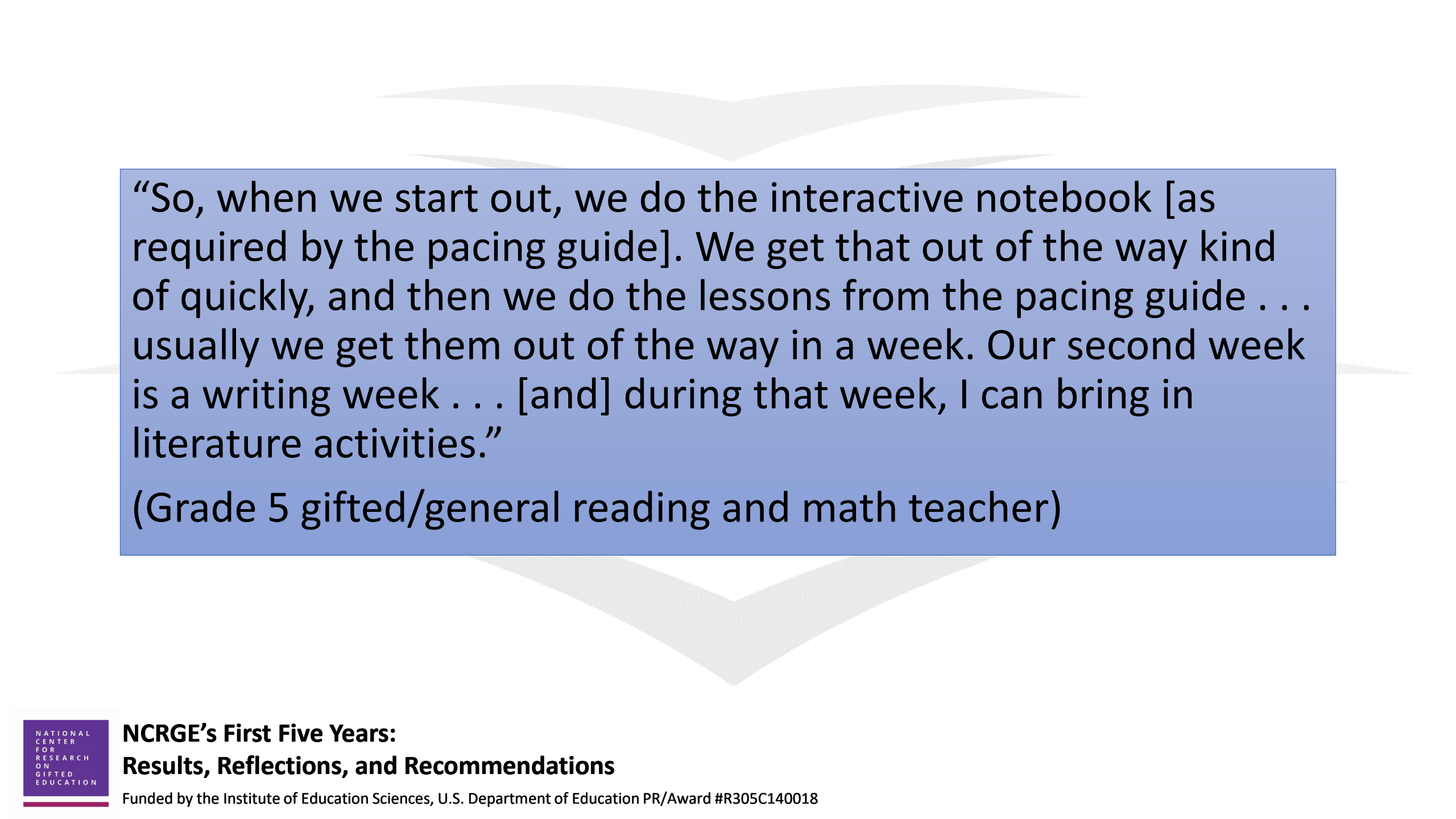


# Autonomy Findings

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“So, when we start out, we do the interactive notebook [as required by the pacing guide]. We get that out of the way kind of quickly, and then we do the lessons from the pacing guide . . . usually we get them out of the way in a week. Our second week is a writing week . . . [and] during that week, I can bring in literature activities.”

(Grade 5 gifted/general reading and math teacher)

# Autonomy Findings

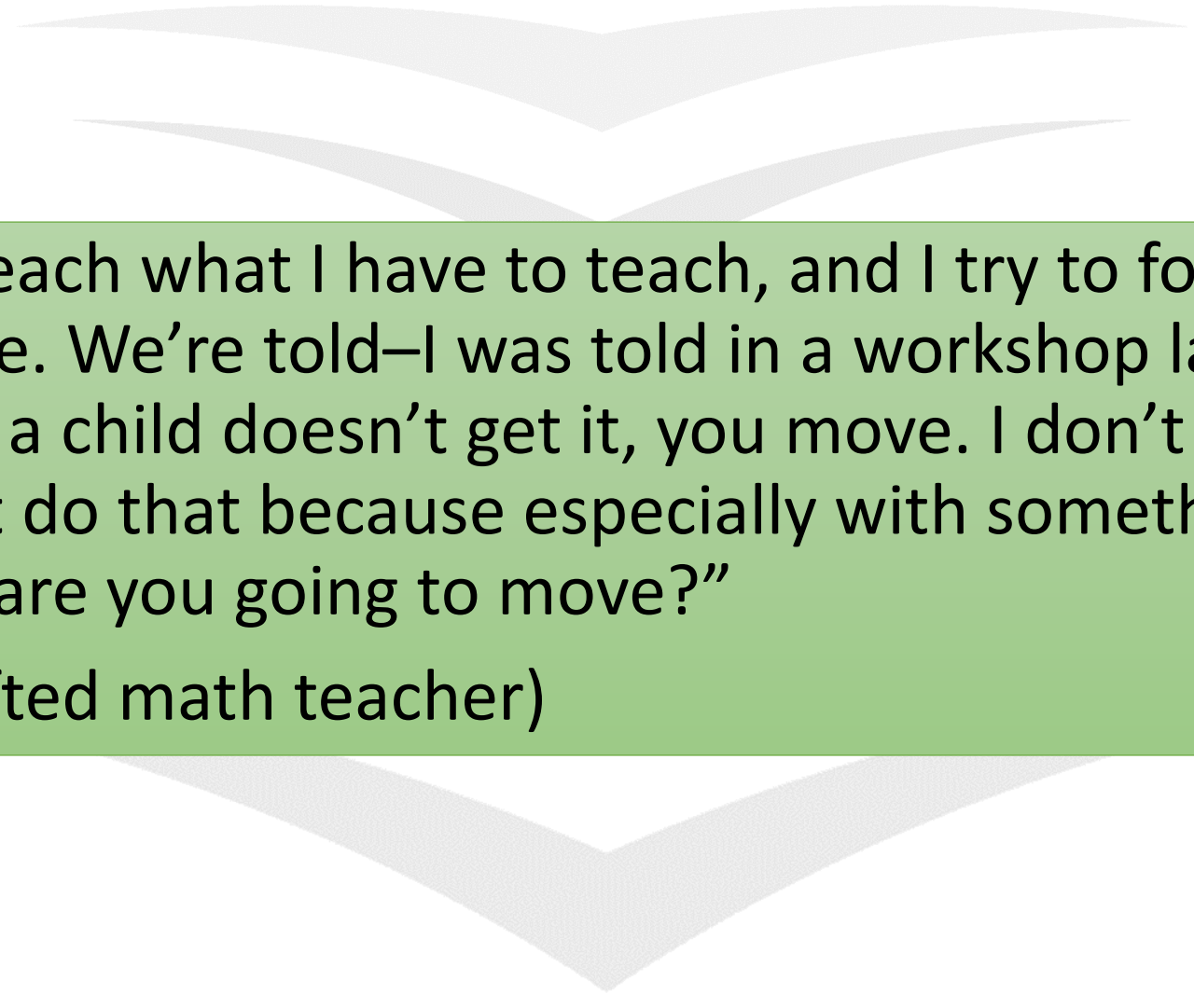
- Teachers differed in their perceptions and reported enactments of autonomy
  - Teachers who perceived autonomy reported exercising it in pacing, instruction, and materials, but not in content
  - Teachers who did not perceive autonomy were limited in the ways they reported enacting autonomy, though they did exercise it in the same three ways

“When [my administrator] came in to observe me last week . . . in my teacher-led center I wasn’t doing vocabulary and I’m supposed to do vocabulary. But I had not finished the writing so I was doing writing where I could conference with them one-on-one and she was asking me, like, “You were doing writing in DI” and I was like, “Well, it was an accident” . . . it was a week [where there] wasn’t a lot of content that we were talking about, so we did writing.”

(Grade 5 general reading teacher)

# Autonomy Findings

- Teachers differed in their perceptions and reported enactments of autonomy
  - Teachers who perceived autonomy reported exercising it in pacing, instruction, and materials, but not in content
  - Teachers who did not perceive autonomy were limited in the ways they reported enacting autonomy, though they did exercise it in the same three ways
  - Teachers who expressed both feeling and not feeling autonomy reported exercising it in the same ways as teachers who perceived autonomy



“I have to teach what I have to teach, and I try to follow the pacing guide. We’re told—I was told in a workshop last month that even if a child doesn’t get it, you move. I don’t agree with that. I don’t do that because especially with something like math, how are you going to move?”

(Grade 4 gifted math teacher)



# Teacher Autonomy

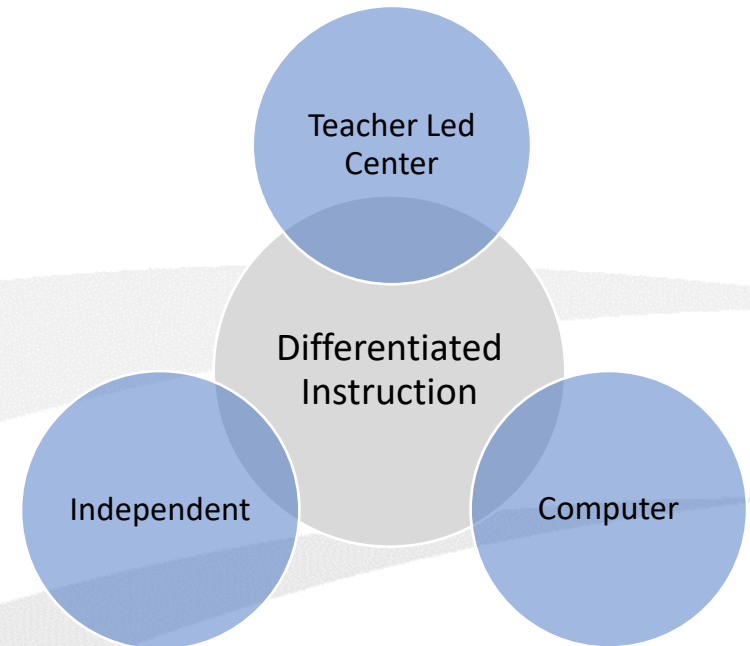
- More perceived autonomy than anticipated
- Prioritization of content goals
- Possibility of school-level factors
- Potential meaning for equity concerns in gifted education

# Differentiated Instruction in the Field

- “A teacher’s reacting responsively to a learner’s needs” (Tomlinson & Allen, 2000)
- “A pedagogical-didactical approach that provides teachers with a starting point for meeting students’ diverse learning needs” (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019)
- Adaptation of content, process, products, and/or learning environment

# District DI Policy

- Designed to blend whole-class, small flexible groups, and individual instruction
- Proactively adjusts teaching and learning to meet children where they are and help them to achieve maximum growth as learners



# Research Questions

- How did teachers make sense of the district policy for differentiated instruction (DI time)?
- How did teachers enact their perception of the district's policy for differentiated instruction?

# Differentiated or Different?

- Teachers often explained their use of DI time to remediate and review with students whom they perceived to need it

# Remediation Orientation

“What we do is we take an hour three times a week and I have a group that comes with me for fifteen minutes and at the same time I have four centers going on. . . . The first group is the lowest group, and that’s a group that I make sure I see those three days a week, which is Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.”

(Grade 4 gifted math and reading teacher)

# Differentiated or Different?

- Teachers often explained their use of DI time to remediate and review with students whom they perceived to need it
- Other students deemed not to need remediation were either given standard small-group tasks or individual time on computer programs



# Challenge as an Afterthought

“I brought [struggling students] up front, separated them; it was like a review while the others were doing enrichment. They knew how to do it and they continue on their own and the others work with me.”  
(Grade 4 general reading and math teacher)

# Differentiated or Different?

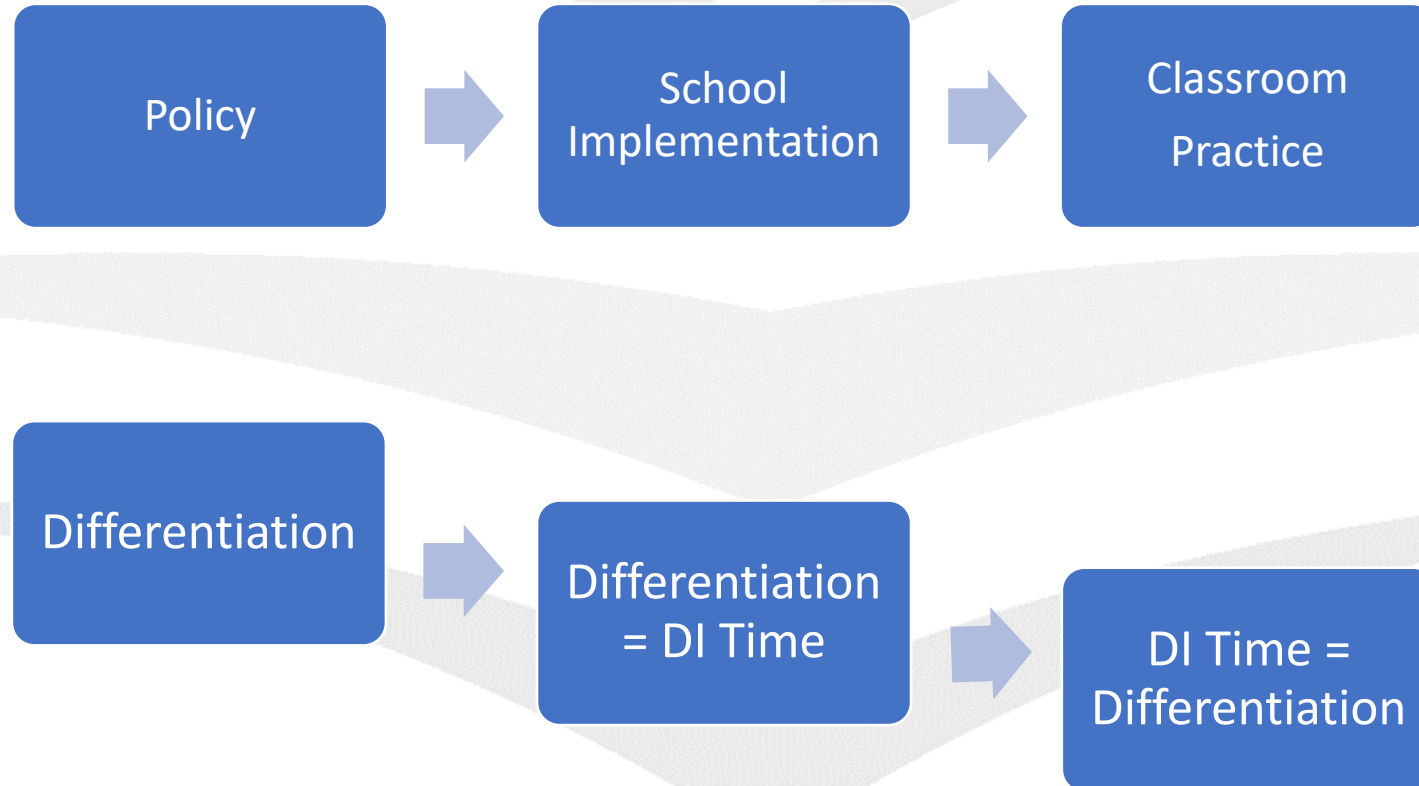
- Teachers often explained their use of DI time to remediate and review with students whom they perceived to need it
- Other students deemed not to need remediation were either given standard small-group tasks or individual time on computer programs
- Teachers framed their use of DI time for remediation rather than differentiation as a result of the intense institutional focus on high-stakes testing

# Institutional Pressures

“When I do small groups—my principal was asking me about that yesterday because she was like, ‘I saw different paperwork for different groups.’ I said, ‘Well, at the beginning of the year I was using different materials and I was meeting with small groups, only a few would get that work and then the other groups would be doing something else. . . . however I realized I needed to change because I wanted to re-teach the topic . . . and have something to show that I’m re-teaching that skill and then assessing it again.’ I needed something to show that progress because that’s what the district looks for. That’s what my principal looks for, how am I tackling those students that are not getting it.”

(Grade 4 general math teacher)

# Differentiated or Different?



# Differentiation

- Differentiation policy was implemented, just not how it was intended
- Remediation was the priority
- Possibility of school-level factors
- Potential meaning for equity concerns in gifted education

# Discussion

- NCRGE findings: no difference in reading and mathematics achievement across types of gifted program
- High-stakes accountability environment may be limiting teacher autonomy and adaptability, contributing to lack of difference in outcomes
- Findings echo literature on high-stakes testing creating challenges
  - For differentiating (Brighton et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2006; Moon et al., 2003)
  - And autonomy (Bauml, 2016; David, 2008)