Gallistel Language Academy operates in three buildings:

10347 S. Ewing Ave.  10200 S. Avenue J  10155 S. Ewing Ave.
Chicago, IL  60617   Chicago, IL  60617  Chicago, IL  60617

Principal: Mr. Patrick MacMahon
Assistant Principals: Ms. Josephine Mounts, Mrs. Kimberly Nelson, and Mrs. Betsy Ruiz

Parent Representatives and Witnesses testifying to the CEFTF: Ms. Patricia Zuniga and Ms. Elena Rios.

Ms. Zuniga gave a verbal presentation, as supported by the following statement and corroborating comments from Ms. Rios:

Gallistel is the oldest CPS school on the city's East Side and also the largest. This community and these students are majority Hispanic and many are below the poverty level. They have been underserved in the city of Chicago.

Our original Main building is 110 years old and the addition that was attached to this building is also over 100 years old. We are currently facing and have been facing severe overcrowding for many, many years. Every year our enrollment grows. Young families with a number of children are moving in as older couples move out. The housing is relatively affordable and new housing which is being built will also be occupied by families with children of school age. This school year, we have 1,450 students.

Right now, our children are spread across three campuses that are more than two blocks apart. Just imagine: The overcrowding is so bad, we have to use three different buildings to accommodate our children! All of our 6th, 7th and 8th Grade students are located in our Branch building 2 blocks away. This Branch building is leased from the Archdiocese of Chicago and has been leased now for well over a decade at great expense to the Chicago Board of Education (over $210,000 a year). At past public hearings on CPS' capital budget, we've shown pictures of this building because it is very inadequate for the needs of the students who are currently housed there. Despite our attempts to get safety and sanitation issues addressed, this building is still sorely lacking: There are only two electrical outlets in most rooms, there is no gym, there is no auditorium, we have run out of classroom space, the building is poorly lit, the PA system functions intermittently, there is only one room with Internet access..... the list goes on. And none of our buildings are handicapped accessible or air-conditioned.

Our students are suffering because of this long-time chronic overcrowding and the splitting up of our students into three buildings. Educationally this situation does not utilize our personnel appropriately. Safety and security concerns are created because students and faculty have to travel more than 2 ½ city blocks to get from building to building – even as there are ongoing safety concerns on the East Side. Our 5th Graders are housed in a functioning private high school – putting much younger children around older ones - and this creates additional concerns. Money and resources are wasted because of the leasing of archdiocesan space, the need for additional personnel in all facilities and CPS’ “band aid approach” to this problem that has been ongoing.
In 2009, the Chicago Public Schools had promised that “eventually” a new school will be built on the East Side. This new school would pull students from Addams School and Gallistel (both are over-crowded schools). Our neighboring schools of Addams and Taylor have bulging populations as well. Addams received an 8 classroom annex recently while Taylor has a relatively new attached annex. Still that has not been enough to address overcrowding in our community’s schools.

The best permanent solution to this ongoing problem is to invest in an entirely new building for Gallistel or to add on to the Main Building. Our hope is that if a new school is ever built, the majority of our students will continue to remain at Gallistel.

Instead, we have been passed over year after year, and still there is no sign that a new school is going to be built any time soon. A new building could be built on a very large vacant lot immediately across from the Branch building where all of our students can be housed, eliminating the need for teachers and students to travel between the three buildings on a daily basis. Or at least, CPS should give us a very large annex to our current Main Building on the Main campus so that we may have all of our students housed together and can continue to move toward the community-centered school for which we have been striving for years.

Right now, there is a lot of work that needs to be done at the Gallistel Main Building which is more than 110 years old. The Main Building needs a lot of renovation and modernization. Even though it has been maintained pretty well, it is lacking in modern attributes like air conditioning and Internet connectivity for our students. It needs more bathrooms, an auditorium, and appropriate classrooms for all teachers. As our current Main Building is configured, it does not have the capacity or the appropriate facilities for grades Pre-K through 8.

Year after year, we have repeated our request for “One Gallistel, Not Three!” We have come to the Chicago Public School’s annual capital budget hearings for several years and have brought hundreds of participants. We have even made DVDs to document these deplorable conditions to show at CPS’ capital budget hearings – year after year after year. At the 2009 CPS hearing, Gallistel brought almost 700 students, community members, parents, teachers, staff members and administrators because we feel that our cause is a very important one.

The improvement in the educational environment is essential for our students to continue to build their levels of academic achievement. The current situation is wasteful of educational resources in teaching staff, materials and in the amount of money used for leasing buildings currently owned by the Chicago Roman Catholic Archdiocese. The safety and security concerns that are raised due to our wide dispersal are also very important to our parents and our staff. We just want ALL of our students to receive an appropriate education in a safe, secure, and excellent learning environment.

All of these matters would be addressed if the Board would just recognize that our students and our community need “One Gallistel, Not Three!”