A 10th grader at Simon Gratz High School was stabbed to death yesterday by a
student in a fourth-floor corridor during a break between classes, police
said.

Timothy Gilbert, 15, of the 3100 block of North 17th Street, just one block
from the Nicetown school, was pronounced dead at Temple University Hospital at
11:25 a.m.

Louis Epps, 17, who lives at the Northern Home for Children, 5301 Ridge
Ave., a city facility for homeless children, was arrested and charged with
murder, possession of an instrument of crime and possession of an offensive
weapon.

Police and school officials said that they believed Gilbert had been
demanding "protection money" from Epps for some time and that the stabbing was
a retaliation.

"It looks like Epps just got fed up with the abuse he was taking and stabbed
the other kid," a detective said.

Frances Canty, 18, an 11th grader, said she had witnessed the stabbing. She
said that at about 10:45 a.m., during the break between the third and fourth
periods, she was standing outside Room 429 when Gilbert ran up a nearby
stairwell.

"Timmy ( Gilbert ) had just come from gym class, and he was huffing and
breathing hard," said Miss Canty as she stood outside the school at 17th and
Lu泽rne Streets moments after the incident. "I asked him why he was breathing
so hard, and he said, 'I just ran up the stairs.' And then this dude just came
up and said something like, 'What did I tell you about that?' and he stabbed
Timmy in the neck."
Gilbert staggered into Room 429, where stenography is taught, blood gushing from a wound in his neck, according to witnesses. Epps ran down another stairwell as students began screaming that there had been a stabbing. Miss Canty said Gilbert walked toward her as she screamed, "Oh my God, Timmy got stabbed."

Gilbert then turned and stumbled and staggered down the stairwell two flights to the second floor, trailing blood behind him. At the same time, Epps was on another stairwell, where he was being grabbed and held by a nonteaching assistant. Epps was holding a bloody paring knife with a 3-inch blade, police said.

Once on the second floor, Gilbert made it to Room 208, the disciplinary office, threw open the door and collapsed face down in a quickly spreading pool of his own blood. First aid was administered, and Gilbert was carried down the stairs to a police cruiser, which took him to the hospital.

Some students left the school right after the incident but returned to their classrooms by noon. Most of the students remained in the building until classes were dismissed about 2 p.m.

Daisy W. Reaves, principal of Simon Gratz, looked wan and tired early yesterday afternoon. Television crews, newspaper reporters and photographers were wandering throughout the school. She sharply reminded a television crew "that I still have a school to run," after crew members had sought to take pictures of a large puddle of blood outside Room 429.

Mrs. Reaves said she had received complaints of students "shaking down" their classmates for money. She said school officials had talked to parents and students about the incidents. "We did everything a school should do," she said.

She said she had been in her office, around the corner from Room 208, when she was told there had been a stabbing.

"I heard something had happened, and I ran out of my office," said Mrs. Reaves, who has been principal for six years of the 2,400-student school. "The trail of blood was enough to let me know something terrible had happened. I've been principal here six years, but after this morning I feel like it's 66 years."
Police and school officials said no other students had been involved in the incident. Elliot Alexander, a spokesman for the school district, said that as far as he knew, it was the first incident of a student being stabbed to death in a Philadelphia school. He said there had been other stabbings, but there had been no fatal stabbings.

Outside the school before noon, students stood in somber groups. Homicide detectives and other police officers were inside and outside the school. Students inside the building shouted down at the students on the street and whooped at the television newscasters.

Michael Brice, 22, stood on 17th Street with a group of friends. The group of young men were stern-faced and angry. Brice said that he graduated from Gratz in 1976 and that he was Gilbert's cousin.

"All I know is he got stabbed," said Brice. "Tim was a good guy, just a regular guy. He played street ball. He went down South to get away from all this . . . . He'd been living with his uncle in South Carolina and came back when school started. I just heard about it and came over."

Brice said that he had seen Gilbert that morning and had lent him a few dollars.

"I don't understand," said Brice. "The guy that did this - he and Tim were supposed to be friends."

Another youth in the group said that he had known Gilbert and that he, too, had seen the incident. He did not want to give his name.

"I don't want to get involved," said the young man. "I saw it. It was quick, it was instantly. I didn't get involved. I get involved, maybe next time they'll get me."

Vice principal Arthur Malin and Mrs. Reaves said they did not know either the victim or suspect well. Mrs. Reaves said she might know them by sight.

Malin said there had been some "disciplinary problems" with Gilbert.

"There are a lot of students here," said Malin, when asked about Gilbert.

"He's a 10th-grade student. What can I say?"