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10 Aug 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...Ansel Oliver/ANN

The principal of Memphis Junior Academy in the U.S. state of Tennessee was found dead this morning at the school, and police have a 17-year-old male student in custody.

Memphis police said that Suzette York, 49, was found dead with a fatal wound and that the student was on the scene when officers arrived.

Police have not released a cause of death or motive and the exact details surrounding the apparent homicide are still under investigation, police spokeswoman Karen Rudolph said.

York, who served as principal of the school since 2008, also taught grades 7 to 10.

"This is a very sad day for all of us in this community, and particularly for the Seventh-day Adventist family," said Steve Haley, president of the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which oversees the school.

"She was not only an administrator, but also a colleague, a friend and a fellow believer," Haley said. "Our prayers are lifted on behalf of her husband as well as the staff and students at Memphis Junior Academy. We are also praying for all those impacted by this tragedy."

"Our faith in God and in our mission remains; to it we now add a commitment to honor Suzette York's service and sacrifice," Haley said.

The school has an enrollment of 74 students in kindergarten through grades 10.

Originally from Canada, Suzette M. York was born on April 18, 1962, and attended Pacific Union College in Angwin, California. She graduated in 1983 with a bachelor's degree in elementary education.

York taught for nine years in the British Columbia and Maritime Conferences in Canada. She first came to Memphis Junior Academy as a teacher in 1996 and served until 2001. She returned in 2008 to serve as principal and teacher.

"She had tremendous love for her students," said Marvin Lowman, secretary of the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference. He said York had, along with others, lobbied the conference education board to expand the school to serve up to grade 12. The board had recently approved the move, Loman said.

"Some students wouldn't go on to other Adventist schools to complete high school. She didn't want that to keep happening," Loman said.

Counseling is being arranged for the students and staff of the school, said Haley, the conference president. A prayer vigil was held this afternoon in a nearby church. Classes are out for the rest of the week.

Haley said classes would resume "when it is appropriate."