

Navigating the New Year: Key risk management trends for 2025

By Amanda Franco, SIA Executive Assistant and Jennifer Serran, SIA Risk Manager

As 2025 begins, school leaders continue to manage both familiar and emerging risks within their districts. From cybersecurity to mental health, the complex landscape of educational risk management demands adaptability and proactive planning. Here we outline key trends and strategies to help administrators, principals and district leaders stay ahead of potential risks and create safer, more resilient school environments:



1. Strengthening cybersecurity measures

Cybersecurity continues to be a top priority as schools become increasingly digital. Threats such as ransomware and phishing attacks are evolving, targeting the education sector with more sophistication. To mitigate these risks, schools are adopting multi-layered defenses, including:

- **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA):** Requiring additional verification steps to access systems, ensuring that only authorized users can access sensitive data.
- **Regular cybersecurity training:** Educating staff, students and administrators on recognizing cyber threats and understanding best practices for online safety.
- **Updated systems and patches:** Ensuring that all systems and software are kept current with the latest versions and patches. Regular updates help close known security gaps and reduce the risk of vulnerabilities being exploited by attackers.

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Nurture your mind and body for overall well-being

The mind-body connection refers to how your thoughts and emotions directly impact your physical health and vice versa.

Think about the last time you felt super stressed. Do you remember what was going on in your mind? What about your body? Chances are your brain raced to find possible solutions, while your body tensed up. Maybe you had stomach issues or a headache or both? Maybe you felt moody, agitated, depressed or even hopeless? If you experience chronic stress, it can lead to long-term mental and physical health concerns such as depression, anxiety and high blood pressure.

It works the other way, too. Being in constant pain or having a health problem like heart disease can impact your emotions. You might become depressed, anxious and stressed, which can affect how well you manage or cope with your illness. Negative thoughts and emotions also can increase stress hormones like cortisol.

Your mind and body can positively influence each other as well.

Your brain produces chemicals, such as endorphins, which can improve your health. These chemicals are natural painkillers; gamma globulin is one of several immune-boosting proteins that the body produces.

Your brain's chemical production is influenced by your thoughts, feelings and expectations. So, if you're ill but maintain hope and keep a positive attitude and a belief that you'll recover, your brain is more likely to produce chemicals that support healing.

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Key risk management trends

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- **Data backups and recovery plans:** Ensuring that data is regularly backed up and that clear protocols exist for data recovery in the event of an attack.

2. Addressing mental health and wellness

The well-being of students and staff remains a crucial focus for school leaders in 2025. The growing recognition of the importance of mental health initiatives as part of overall school safety continues. Trends include:

- **Mental health support programs:** Provide accessible mental health resources, counseling, and peer support for students and staff members. For students, the importance of implementing preventive safety measures to the above-mentioned resources is paramount. Background checks and services in unobstructed-view settings establish support for students in the safest ways possible. Staff are encouraged to utilize their employee assistance program (EAP) for a variety of resources to help with both work and personal matters.
- **Staff wellness initiatives:** Implement wellness programs, such as stress management workshops, access to mental health days and mindfulness training sessions. These initiatives can help reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction.
- **Work-life balance initiatives:** Address the stress and workload of staff members, which can reduce burnout and improve retention rates.

For district staff, SIA provides virtual training sessions on topics related to mental and physical well-being. Contact tfranco@sia-jpa.org to learn more.

3. Enhancing campus safety measures

Considering ongoing concerns around physical security, schools are investing in comprehensive safety protocols and technologies to protect students and staff. Key strategies include:

- **Staff safety team meetings:** Consistent meetings to address campus safety concerns and regularly review safety measures on secure campuses (e.g., locked doors/gates, verification of visitor check-in badges/stickers).
- **Emergency preparedness drills:** Regular drills and training sessions to prepare staff and students for potential emergencies, such as natural disasters or active threat situations.
- **Surveillance and access control upgrades:** Installation/upgrade of cameras, locking systems and alarm systems to enhance campus security and ensure a swift response to incidents.

4. Legal and regulatory compliance in education

Keeping up with changes in state and federal regulations is essential to mitigating liability and maintaining compliance. Continuing in 2025, school leaders will need to navigate:

- **Privacy regulations and data security laws:** Education on new or updated privacy regulations that impact student data and cybersecurity requirements.
- **Staff training on compliance issues:** Regular training to ensure that staff are aware of and adhere to regulations related to student safety, reporting requirements and privacy.
- **Liability coverage and documentation:** Maintenance of updated liability insurance coverage from service providers to protect schools and district leaders.

5. Environmental and climate-related risks

The impact of climate change on school operations is becoming more evident, with extreme weather events increasingly affecting California schools. Proactive steps to mitigate climate-related risks include:

- **Emergency response plans for natural disasters:** Developing and practicing comprehensive response plans for events such as wildfires, floods and power outages.
- **Being fire-ready:** Preparing for wildfire risks by establishing fire evacuation plans, maintaining defensible space around school buildings, and educating staff and students on fire safety procedures. Regularly assess buildings and grounds for fire hazards to ensure a safer environment.
- **Collaborating with local emergency services:** Partnering with local fire departments and emergency management agencies to conduct fire risk assessments, receive up-to-date fire risk information, and coordinate evacuation or shelter-in-place procedures. Establishing these connections can ensure a quick response and additional resources during wildfire emergencies.



Preparing for 2025 and beyond

Navigating risk in 2025 requires a complete approach that combines preventative measures, compliance and awareness. School leaders are encouraged to adopt a proactive mindset, remaining flexible and open to evolving risk management strategies. By staying informed on emerging trends and implementing robust risk management practices, school administrators and district leaders can create a safer, more supportive learning environment for everyone.

* Artificial intelligence contributed to the development of this article using OpenAI (2024).





Security in artificial intelligence

Confronting challenges, implementing solutions

By Gustavo Mastroianni, SIA Chief Information Security Officer

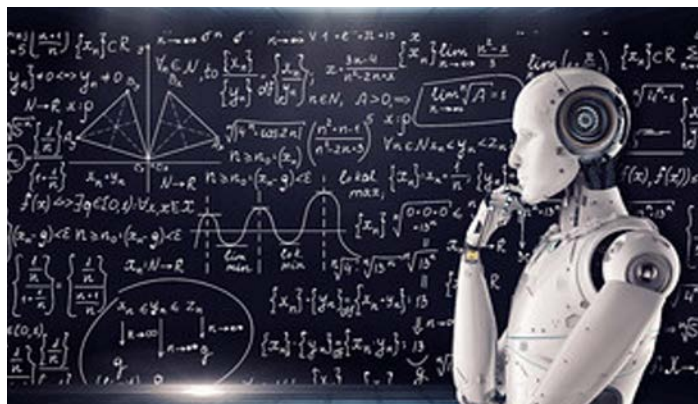
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming industries, automating processes and enhancing decision-making across the globe. However, as AI systems grow more integral to society, ensuring their security has become a critical challenge. From data breaches to adversarial attacks, AI security encompasses a range of vulnerabilities and solutions that demand attention.

Key security challenges in AI

- **Data privacy and breaches:** AI systems rely on vast amounts of data, including sensitive personal information. This dependency creates a significant risk of data breaches. If malicious actors access training datasets or inference systems, they can exploit this information for fraudulent or harmful purposes.
- **Adversarial attacks:** Adversarial attacks involve subtle manipulations of input data to deceive AI models. For instance, an attacker might slightly alter an image to make a facial recognition system misidentify someone. Such attacks pose severe risks in critical applications like autonomous driving and cybersecurity.
- **Model theft and reverse engineering:** AI models often represent significant intellectual property investments. Attackers may attempt to steal or reverse-engineer these models, undermining proprietary technology and enabling unauthorized usage.
- **Bias exploitation:** If an AI system harbors biases in its training data, attackers could exploit these biases to generate unfair outcomes. For example, biased hiring algorithms might be manipulated to discriminate further against certain groups.
- **Trojan attacks and backdoors:** Trojan attacks involve embedding malicious components within an AI model. These components remain dormant until activated by specific triggers, allowing attackers to execute unauthorized actions covertly.

Strategies for enhancing AI security

- **Secure data practices:** Implementing encryption, access controls and secure storage for data can mitigate the risk of breaches. Federated learning—a method where data remains decentralized—is another approach to enhance data security.
- **Robust model testing:** Regularly testing AI systems for vulnerabilities, such as susceptibility to adversarial attacks, is crucial. Techniques like adversarial training—exposing models to manipulated data during training—can improve resilience.



- **Model watermarking:** Watermarking AI models can help protect intellectual property. These watermarks are embedded within the model and can verify ownership if theft or reverse engineering occurs.
- **Bias mitigation:** Conducting audits of training datasets and applying fairness-aware algorithms can reduce biases. Continuous monitoring and updates to models ensure they adapt to evolving ethical standards.
- **Developing AI-specific security standards:** Governments, industries and academia must collaborate to create comprehensive security standards tailored to AI. These guidelines should address data privacy, model integrity and ethical considerations.

Future directions in AI security

The AI security landscape is dynamic, with new challenges and solutions emerging rapidly. Innovations such as explainable AI (XAI) and quantum computing are set to play vital roles. XAI improves transparency, making it easier to identify vulnerabilities, while quantum techniques could revolutionize encryption methods. Additionally, global collaboration will be essential. International frameworks and agreements can ensure consistent AI security practices and prevent misuse on a broader scale.

Conclusion

Security in AI is not just a technical challenge but a societal imperative. As AI systems become more ubiquitous, securing them against diverse threats will require a holistic approach involving robust technologies, ethical considerations and global cooperation. Addressing these challenges proactively will ensure that AI continues to benefit humanity safely and equitably.



Nurture your mind

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Fueling the connection

While much of life can be out of our control, we can do our best to control what we feed our minds and bodies. To maintain both, a diet should include a variety of nutrients – proteins, fibers, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. These nutrients help regulate mood, enhance clear thinking and promote alertness. They also fuel the body, providing support for physical activity, muscle strength, immune function and overall vitality.

The brain-nutrient-mental health connection works both ways. When we're stressed, anxious or sad, it may be difficult to eat, let alone prepare nutritious meals. This lack of nutrients can worsen how we feel as the brain struggles to function properly without the right fuel. It impacts physical health, too, leading to fatigue, muscle weakness, disrupted digestion and a weakened immune system, all of which can create a vicious cycle. If the digestive system isn't functioning well, the brain doesn't get the nutrients it needs, making it even harder to think clearly and feel balanced.

Ways to care for your whole self

1. Identify your feelings. Staying emotionally healthy means being aware of your inner experiences. Learn to recognize your feelings as they arise, noting where you feel them in your body. Instead of pushing them down, practice naming emotions – sadness, anxiety, frustration – and identifying their triggers. This can help you process and cope with your emotions.

2. Practice being grateful. Gratitude is associated with many physical benefits, such as a strengthened immune system and a decreased risk of depression, anxiety and substance use. By paying attention to and expressing thanks for the good things in your life, you can gain and nurture a sense of satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment and humility. Being grateful also can help you build resilience and cope with adversity. It offers a positive way to deal with stress by giving you a way to draw your focus away from the stressor and toward positivity.

3. Eat nutritious food. Consider ways to help yourself steer toward nutrient-rich foods. For example, prepare and store nutritious meals and snacks in advance. Making one-pot meals like stews, soups and casseroles can also be a great way to pack in nutrients, while saving yourself cleanup time and hassle. Consider introducing small changes to improve your diet – cook one more meal at home every week instead of eating out, skip dessert or add another serving of vegetables to a meal.

4. Move your body. Activity releases feel-good hormones, like endorphins, which boost mood and reduce stress. Whether it's a brisk walk, home workouts, yoga, sports or simply taking the stairs, find activities that you enjoy and fit them into your day-to-day life to keep your body and mind active and fit.

5. Relax and rest. Schedule time to do things you enjoy. That might mean turning down some invitations to give yourself time and space to recharge or avoid stress triggers. When you have small breaks, try deep breathing, stretching or giving yourself a quick neck and shoulder massage. These small moments of self-care can add up, easing tension and calming your mind.

It's also crucial to get enough sleep. Good rest helps your brain process emotions and improves your overall well-being. Consider ways to improve your sleep, such as creating a calming bedtime routine and going to bed and waking up at the same time each day to help regulate your internal clock.

Source: Optum

Electrical safety in your school district

The improper use of electrical appliances can cause both physical injury and property damage. Even minor electrical shocks can be dangerous and may lead to bigger problems if not immediately addressed. Paper overload, often found in our classrooms and offices, is just an electrical spark away from a fire.

Common electrical hazards in schools

- Damaged cords and outlets
- Extension cords "chained" together
- Outlets covered by paper
- Overloaded outlets and power strips

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Did you know?

You can order free warning labels through the SIA website. We have stickers to help with ladder safety, alarm warnings, fire extinguisher identification and more. Visit the SIA website [Materials Order Form](#) page. Labels are free to SIA member districts only.



Electrical safety

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- Electrical ground connections removed from plugs
- Improperly disconnected computers
- Electrical cords and appliances near sinks and other water sources
- Cords run under carpeting or rugs
- Electric heaters under desks or near flammable materials

Taking precautions

- Plug high-amperage appliances, such as refrigerators, space heaters and microwaves, directly into outlets – never into power strips or extension cords.
- Report all damaged cords and outlets to the appropriate site staff. Don't use until repaired or replaced.
- Never modify or remove a guard. Guards protect you from energized equipment parts. Don't use power tools with the guards removed.
- Remember that the risk of electric shock is greater in areas that are wet or damp. Take proper precautions.
- Know the location of the utility shut-off. Shut-off switches should be appropriately marked for easy recognition.
- Lockout and tagout when electrical equipment or lines are to be serviced, maintained or adjusted.
- Provide 36 inches of space in front of electrical panels for easy access. Don't cover panels with posters or other decorations.
- Always use ladders made of wood or other non-conductive materials when working with or near electricity or power lines.
- Keep equipment such as ladders, cranes, man-lifts, and scaffolds away from power lines and live electrical wires.
- Be careful when moving any machinery with electrical cords. Take your time.
- Don't rush a job without taking the proper precautions for working with electricity.

Visit the *Material Orders* page of SIA's website to order free warning labels for electrical safety. Electrical safety training is available online through *Public School Works*. Also see the *Cal/OSHA Guide to Electrical Safety: Cal/OSHA Guide to Electrical Safety*.

Reasonable cause: Alcohol and drug testing training

SIA will host the annual *Reasonable Cause: Alcohol and Drug Testing in the School Transportation Setting* training on Wednesday, February 5, 2025. There will be two virtual sessions offered – 10 a.m. to noon or 1 to 3 p.m.

The course will provide an overview of the impact of employee substance abuse and the articulation and application of "reasonable cause" for drug testing. Each presentation will meet the two-hour reasonable suspicion training required by the Federal Department of Transportation law for school transportation supervisors. The training also has relevance for any supervisor in the school environment.

To register contact Teresa Franco at tfranco@sia-jpa.org.



QUOTE TO NOTE

"Take care of yourself. You have to draw healthy boundaries around your own soul so that you can mature and reach the destiny of greatness that's within you."

— Edward T. Creagan, M.D.

The material in this newsletter should be part of your Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP).

Keep a copy of this newsletter in your IIPP binder.