

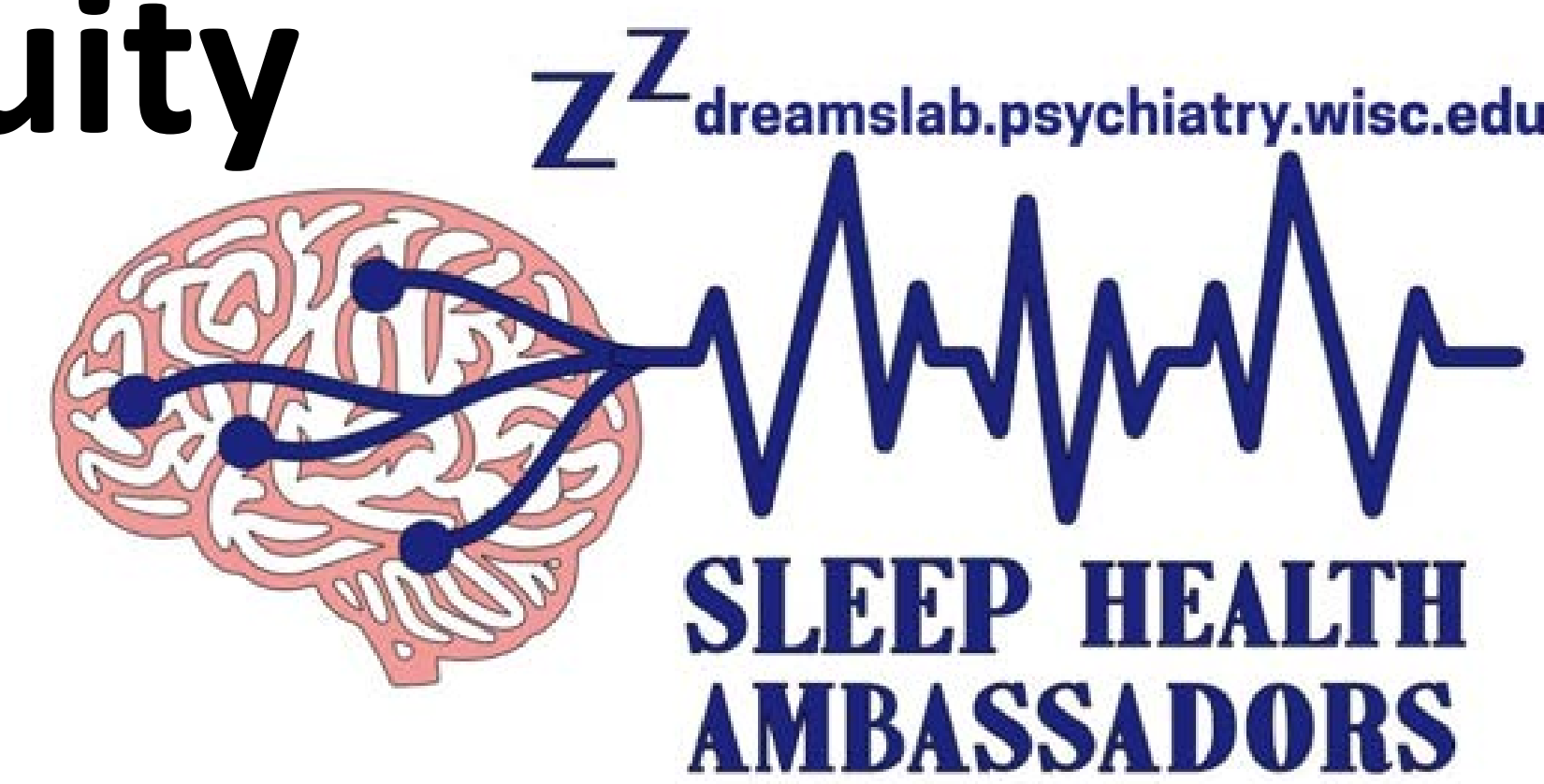
Sleep Health Ambassadors:

Empowering Youth to Promote Sleep Health and Advance Health Equity



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INTRODUCTION

Sleep: The missing pillar of public health.

Sleep is essential for healthy brain, emotional, and physical development in children and adolescents. Yet, despite its importance, sleep is largely absent from public health priorities and school health curricula. In Wisconsin, over 30% of children and 75% of adolescents fall short of recommended sleep guidelines. Poor sleep is linked to depression, suicidality, obesity, behavior problems, and reduced academic performance. Sleep health disparities further mirror inequities in socioeconomic status and race. Addressing sleep early—and in community settings—offers a powerful opportunity to improve youth health equity.

METHODS

Training teens to teach.

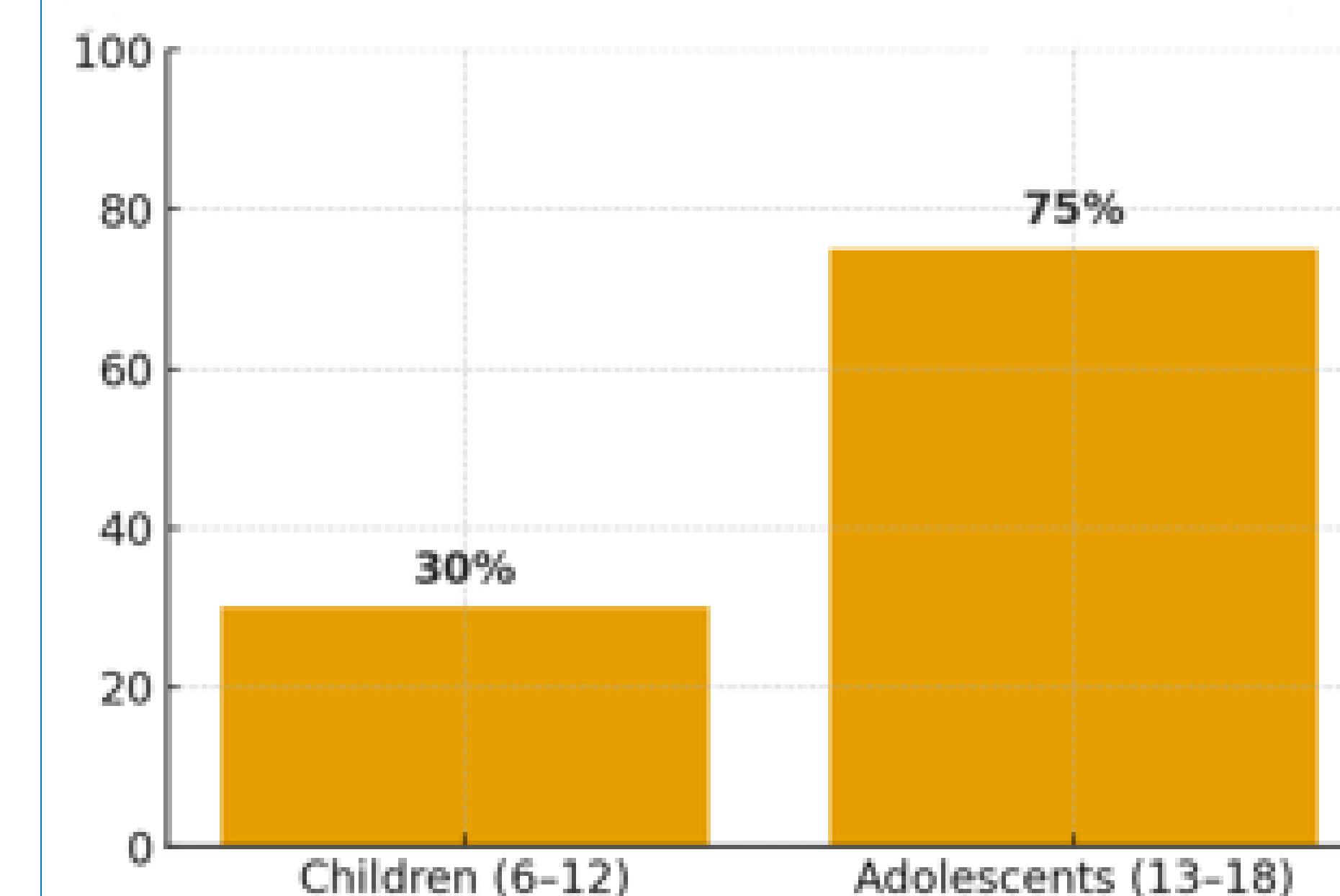
To meet this need, we developed the *Sleep Health Ambassadors (SHA)* program, which trains high school students as near-peer educators to deliver sleep health education to younger youth.

•**Recruitment:** High school Ambassadors were selected through partnerships with local organizations.

•**Training:** Ambassadors completed an intensive two-week “sleep boot camp” at UW–Madison, learning sleep science, health communication, and youth engagement strategies.

•**Outreach:** Ambassadors began delivering interactive lessons and activities in community settings, including local science festivals and family events.

Percent of Wisconsin youth not meeting sleep duration guidelines



Through our partnership with Madison College STEM Academy, which recruits students from districts across Wisconsin, SHA already extends impact beyond Dane County

RESULTS

From training to action.

Pilot Cohort: 4 Ambassadors completed training and launched community outreach.

Events: Ambassadors are scheduled at several community science nights, school-based programs, and local festivals.

Engagement: Children and families will participate in interactive activities such as myth-busting games, bedtime routine planning, and demonstrations on the effects of sleep loss.

Feasibility: The pilot confirmed the practicality of recruiting, training, and mobilizing Ambassadors as youth sleep health educators.

DISCUSSION

A scalable model for healthier communities.

The Sleep Health Ambassadors program demonstrates the feasibility and promise of a near-peer model for addressing youth sleep health. Early results suggest strong community interest, with Ambassadors gaining leadership skills while engaging younger children in accessible, fun, and evidence-based activities. By centering youth as messengers, the program enhances credibility and relatability of health information, and has the potential to reduce sleep health disparities over time. Future directions include expanding recruitment statewide, developing a social media component, and implementing a formal evaluation framework to measure outcomes in sleep knowledge, behaviors, and health equity.