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Massachusetts Elementary Students Led Campaign to Install '3-D' Crosswalk in Front of School

The optical illusion uses shaded block of paint to make crossing stripes appear to float in the air



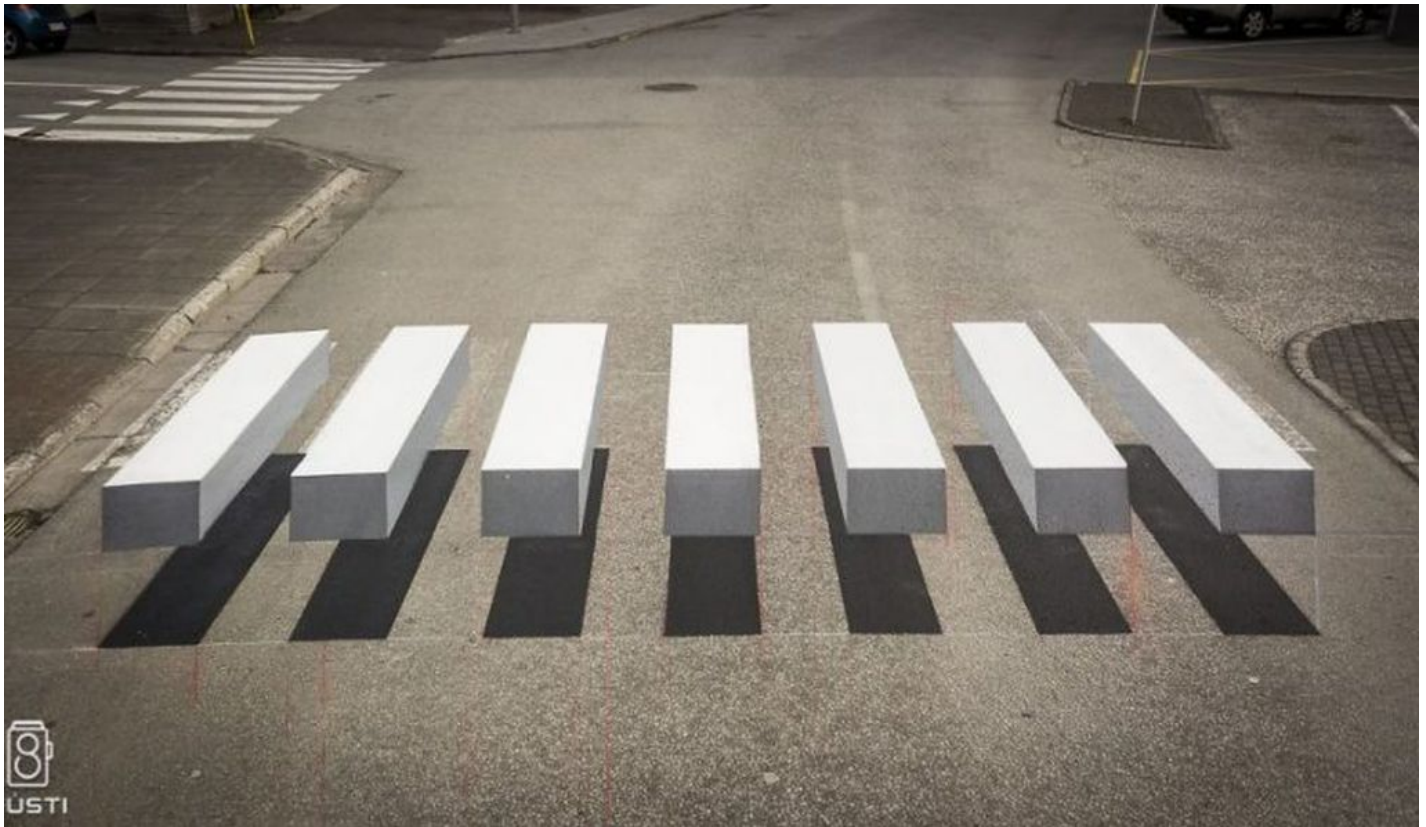
Fifth-grader Eric and fourth-grader Isa spent a year working to bring their idea to life (City of Medford/Mayor's Office via Facebook)

By [Meilan Solly](#)
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Thank fifth-grader Eric and fourth-grader Isa of Brooks Elementary School in Medford, Massachusetts, for a new optical illusion designed to force drivers to slow down in their community school zone. As Matt Rocheleau reports for the [Boston Globe](#), the pair, spurred to action by a classmate's narrow miss with a speeding car, successfully petitioned the city to install an unusual crosswalk near their school. The nontraditional crosswalk debuted earlier this week and will soon be joined by similar "3-D" crosswalks installed at Medford's three other elementary schools.

According to [Mental Floss](#)' Michele Debczak, the design concept is simple: to create the illusion, the two-dimensional, grayish blocks are simply angled off of brighter shades. The result makes the flat white sidewalk stripes appear as raised blocks to oncoming cars.

Medford is far from the first city to employ such eye-catching crossings: Dubbed "[Icelandic crosswalks](#)" in honor of the country that popularized them, the traffic safety tools have also caught on in [Kansas](#), [India](#), China and Russia, [Iceland magazine reports](#). In 2017, Ralf Trylla, the local government worker behind the "levitating" crosswalk in the Icelandic city of Ísafjörður, told [Quartz](#)'s Anne Quito that the illusion offers a promising alternative to [speed bumps](#), which have been shown to exacerbate [air pollution levels](#) by encouraging drivers to abruptly speed up, then slow down.



Known as "Icelandic crosswalks" in honor of the country that popularized them, the unusual crossings use an optical illusion to force drivers to slow down (Gústi Productions via YouTube)

Still, as Adam Gaffin of Boston-area news site [Universal Hub](#) points out, the design has its critics. Last year, [Cambridge](#), home of Harvard University, opted to leave its crosswalks as is amid concerns that drivers would view Icelandic crossings as “[real raised objects in the roadway](#)” and therefore swerve to avoid them.

This likely won't be an issue with the Brooks Elementary School crosswalk, which Gaffin reports is situated at the corner of a “narrow side street that almost forces drivers ... to go slowly anyway as they turn onto it.”

According to local news station [WBZ4](#), the students behind the idea, Isa and Eric (whose brother had the brush with the speeding vehicle), spent a year working on their proposal. Aided by Michael Coates, a teacher at the school and adviser to the city's [Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility](#), the duo shared their proposal with local leaders including Medford Mayor Stephanie Burke. After the city later gave the work the green light, it commissioned artist [Nate Swain](#) to implement the design while students were away for spring break.

“It's a pretty cool concept for traffic calming and I do like the idea of slowing traffic down,” Swain—a local artist known for creating photo murals in Boston's North End, according to [Curbed's](#) Tom Acitelli—tells the *Globe's* Rocheleau.

It remains to be seen how parents, students and Medford residents will react to the crossing, but the finished product has at least one vocal fan: As Isa tells [WBZ4](#), “I love it. It looks amazing. Exactly how I pictured it and more.”

About Meilan Solly

Meilan Solly is a Washington, D.C.-based arts and science journalist. She has previously served as *Smithsonian's* American Society of Magazine Editors intern and a *Kiplinger.com* editorial intern. Website: