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Students convince Medford to install '3-D' crosswalks at elementary schools

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, April 22, 2019, 4:09 p.m.

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(CITY OF MEDFORD/MAYOR'S OFFICE)

At the urging of a pair of young students, Medford is taking an eye-catching approach to try to increase safety for children walking to and from school.

The city on Monday unveiled a newly painted three-dimensional crosswalk at one of its elementary schools, and officials said they planned to install more of them soon at other schools.

The crosswalk is actually flat, but its stripes appear to an approaching driver to be floating white blocks.

Such optical illusions, intended to get drivers to pay attention and drive slowly, [have caught on in a handful of cities around the world](#).

“It’s been really well received and there’s a lot of excitement about it,” said Michael Coates, a teacher at the Brooks Elementary School, where the unusual crosswalk debuted.

Coates explained that the idea was presented last year by a pair of students — fifth-grader Eric and fourth-grader Isa — who were concerned about drivers occasionally speeding near the school.

Eric's younger brother was almost hit by a car once outside of the school, Coates said.

“Fortunately, he wasn't hurt, but it was a near-accident and there were complaints for a while about people driving a little too quickly” near the school, Coates said.

The children launched their effort through [Medford's Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility](#), a district-wide after-school program that supports student-led projects to improve the community.

They pitched their idea to highest levels of City Hall and won over local leaders, said Coates, an adviser to the program. The city hired a local artist who painted the crosswalk during the school's April break last week.

A slew of city officials gathered at the Brooks school Monday morning for an unveiling ceremony, including Mayor Stephanie M. Burke.

“I’m glad that the City was able to work with Isa and Eric of Medford’s CCSR Club to make their out-of-the-box idea become a reality,” Burke said in a statement. “It truly is a great example of our youngest generation working hard to improve the quality of life in our City.”

Burke said the 3-D crosswalks will be installed at the city’s three other elementary schools.

At the Brooks school, the crosswalk runs across the end of a driveway where cars roll through to pick up students before exiting onto Allston Street. It was reported on previously by the [Universal Hub](#) website.

Artist [Nate Swain](#) said he’d seen photos of such three-dimensional crosswalks and other unique traffic calming optical illusions before. And he’d been dying to try painting one.

“It’s a pretty cool concept for traffic calming and I do like the idea of slowing traffic down,” said Swain, who does a mix of commissioned and guerrilla public art and works as a facilities manager at Artists for Humanity. “There’s so many traffic fatalities and injuries, and I’m all about making sure pedestrians feel safe.”

Swain said the project took about a half-dozen cans of traffic-striping paint and 15 hours spread across three days, to allow time for coats of paint to dry.

On Monday morning, Coates said he was looking forward to seeing how parents react to the new crosswalk after they scoop their kids up from school later in the afternoon.

“At dismissal is really the first time it’s going to be put to use to slow down traffic and I’m sure it will,” Coates said, adding that he’s looking forward to seeing more of them installed at other schools. “And then we’ll see what happens. Maybe it will expand throughout the city.”

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