



Technology for Autism Now (TAN) is a Boston startup dedicated to improving the lives of children with autism. Founded by Marie Duggan, TAN develops a broad range of mobile applications to facilitate communication, education, and participation in order for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder to lead more fuller, functional lives at home, school, and in their communities.

### Why we did this

In 2012, 1 out of every 88 children born, was diagnosed with Autism. Marie Duggan, a parent of a child with Autism who attended the Boston Public Schools, had for years been creating her own tools and systems to help her child. These tools and systems often involved binders of images that she would arrange to teach him basic skills, breaking down those skills into specific steps. She realized that these analog systems could be turned into an app, leveraging the power of tablet technology to better support not just her child but many other families as well — particularly those connected with the Boston Public Schools.

## The Experiment

*Hypothesis: 1. A piece of technology, developed by an expert, can produce meaningful results for kids with autism. 2. We can construct a collaboration between a local innovator and Boston Public Schools to test new technology in schools.*

Although Marie Duggan had a powerful idea and experience, she was not a coder nor – until then – an entrepreneur in the conventional sense. We connected Marie with two local companies who helped her design and build an alpha version of her app. And, with the support of the Verizon Foundation, we worked with her and The Boston Public Schools to test TAN's Task Buddy app in several classrooms in the BPS and evaluate the results.

One of the most important elements of Task Buddy is its ability to collect meaningful data and share that data with educators and parents. By logging how many steps each task takes, for examples, the app can help reveal how a student is progressing over time, where she or he is struggling, and what areas should be focused on both at home and at school.

## The Results and Lessons Learned

- The app was very positively received within the Boston Public Schools. From the beta-test in the Boston Public Schools, Task Buddy helped in teaching 73% of all lessons; there was a 50% reduction in the time necessary to complete tasks over the course of the study; and 40% of students completed the tasks with minimal prompts.
- In part based on the feedback from the teachers involved in the beta-test, Marie evolved the platform into AutiKnow, participated in the MassChallenge accelerator, has plans to scale it up use of the app within BPS and has joined conversations all over the world about both TAN and the power of technology to help autistic youth.
- We learned two key ingredients for a successful beta-test of new technology in classrooms: (1) teachers who have the time and interest to integrate new technology into an existing curriculum, and (2) ample support from the entrepreneur to explain and troubleshoot.

## Learn More

- Partners: [Technology for Autism Now](#), [Boston Public Schools](#)
- The Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI0fiTygSeE>
- The Pilot Evaluation: [Task Buddy Pilot Summary](#)
- An Article: [Boston's Top Social Innovators: Marie Duggan of Technology for Autism Now](#), David Brown, *Bostinno*, 09/17/2012
- An Article: [Boston's Autism App](#), Lawrence Harmon, *The Boston Globe*, 04/20/2010
- Contact the Boston Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics to learn more ([newurbanmechanics@boston.gov](mailto:newurbanmechanics@boston.gov))

## EDUCATION