

How to Know If Your Education Business Is a Fit for Tuck Advisors

By Dr. Mike McKenna, M&A Advisor, Tuck Advisors

I spent more than 20 years in education as a teacher, reading specialist, principal, district leader, and ultimately Chief Academic Officer for one of Pennsylvania's largest school districts. That journey gave me a deep understanding of the complexities that come with building and leading in this sector: navigating bureaucracy, fighting for resources, creating something meaningful against the odds, and always asking whether the work is actually making a difference.

Now, as an M&A advisor at Tuck Advisors, I work with education founders and CEOs who are exploring what comes next. And one of the first questions I get is always some version of: **"Is my business even a fit for this process?"**

I don't guess at that answer. My instinct at Tuck Advisors is always: I'm not sure yet, let me ask the right questions and find out. Einstein reportedly said that if he had an hour to solve a problem, he'd spend 55 minutes asking questions. That's how we approach every new engagement. Before I can tell you whether Tuck is the right fit for your business, I want to understand what you've built, why it matters, and what a successful outcome actually looks like for you.

Here's what those questions usually reveal.

First, the hard truth about selling a business.

Before we talk about fit, it's worth being honest about the landscape. Between 70-80% of privately held businesses listed for sale never close a transaction. The top reasons: unrealistic valuation expectations, weak financial documentation, excessive owner dependency, and seller unreadiness. Even deals that make it to a signed Letter of Intent have a troubling failure rate. The average broken LOI spends over 100 days in exclusivity before collapsing, burning time, fees, and momentum.

That's not meant to discourage you. It's meant to set the stakes clearly, because the single most important decision a seller makes isn't the price they hope to get. **It's the advisor they choose to get there.** Advisor selection alone impacts transaction probability by 40-60 percentage points.

In 2025, Tuck Advisors closed 100% of its transactions, eight for eight. That's not luck. That's process, preparation, and the kind of 212-degree effort that turns "most deals don't close" into "most deals do."

You're in the right size range.

Tuck Advisors works with education businesses in the lower-middle market with enterprise values between \$5M and \$75M, with particular depth in the \$10M-\$50M mid-market range. If your business is generating meaningful, recurring revenue and has built something defensible, you're likely in the conversation. That said, we are selective. We turn down clients who aren't ready, because protecting the integrity of your first time to market matters. A failed marketing attempt makes re-listing 30-40% harder and reduces offer volume significantly. **Getting it right the first time is everything.**

Your model has something a buyer wants to scale.

Throughout my career, I've seen firsthand what makes an education organization genuinely valuable: repeatable outcomes, loyal customer relationships, proprietary curriculum or methodology, and a brand that means something to its audience.

At Tuck Advisors, we're heads-up enough to spot where your business fits in a broader acquisition landscape, and heads-down enough to execute with precision once we do. We position education assets to EdTech roll-ups, publishing companies, workforce development platforms, and financial sponsors who are actively seeking recurring revenue and scalable content delivery models. **And we reach buyers that most advisors simply don't know**, through a proprietary database of 45,000+ companies and our Bounty Banker™ network of 170+ CEOs who open doors through warm, relationship-driven introductions rather than cold outreach.

You're facing a moment of transition, and you're ready for it.

Maybe you've built the business to a point where you're asking what the next chapter looks like. Maybe a strategic buyer reached out and you're not sure whether to take the call seriously. **That's exactly what our UFO Response™ service was designed for.** Maybe you're ready to step back but want to make sure what you've built lands in the right hands.

Whatever the moment, one thing I've learned at Tuck Advisors is this: **time kills deals.** We set deadlines and we hit them. The biggest risk for any seller isn't a bad offer. It's letting indecision and delay erode the opportunity entirely.

Your business comes with complexity, and that's a reason to start early.

Education businesses carry regulatory layers, accreditation dependencies, instructor retention concerns, and community obligations that most M&A advisors simply aren't equipped to navigate. Businesses with 12 or more months of pre-sale preparation achieve success rates of 65-75%, compared to the 20-30% industry average. Tuck Advisors begins that preparation before a single buyer is contacted, building clean, defensible financials, a targeted buyer list, and a fully constructed data room so that diligence surprises don't surface late and collapse the deal.

Having spent decades inside education systems, I know how to translate this complexity into a story that gives buyers confidence rather than pause. **Details matter. Accuracy matters.** We never trust numbers without verifying them, and we never let a fixable problem become a deal-breaker.

You want an advisor who cares about more than the close.

At Tuck Advisors, we plant 1,000 trees for every closed transaction. It's a small but meaningful reflection of how we operate, building something sustainable, not just transactional. We bring genuine empathy and an entrepreneurial spirit to every engagement. **Our clients aren't just clients; they're our extended team, and we succeed together.**

For me personally, that's not a values statement. It's how I operated for two decades in schools that served real kids and real communities. **Education businesses change lives.** They deserve an advisor who knows that, and who brings the preparation, precision, and personalized attention to make sure that legacy carries forward through a transaction.

The bottom line.

If you've built an education business with an enterprise value in the \$5M-\$75M range and are thinking about what comes next, the best time to start asking the right questions is now. Before an offer arrives, before urgency forces your hand, and before the window closes.

Dr. Mike McKenna is an M&A Advisor at Tuck Advisors, specializing in education sector transactions.