BUILD CONNECTIONS
Things to keep in mind when helping students find value in learning

1. ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS OF FRUSTRATION OR BOREDOM WITH SCHOOL
Affirm that students might not find every moment of school relevant, interesting, or exciting. Then, encourage students to explore new ways of thinking about schoolwork.

2. CREATE AN AUTONOMY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FIND TOPICS YOU'RE INTERESTED IN AND IMMERSE YOURSELF
Help students explore and think about how school connects to THEIR life (not YOUR life). Avoid telling them why they “must learn this.” Instead, encourage them to consider how it might connect to different aspects of their life (classroom, family, daily life, careers, helping others).

3. PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS
Students may need help initiating examples, so be ready with some ideas of your own connections, or share connections made by other students. The more students can self-initiate connections, the more likely they will perceive the value in school work.

4. ASK FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS
Students may start with vague connections (“Learning this will help me in the future.”). Be prepared to ask questions that encourage students to be specific (“Tell me about the skills needed for your hobby.” “What else do you know about this topic?” “Do you know of any examples of anyone else using this in their life?”).

5. PROVIDE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TOPIC
Students need to have enough exposure to and information about a topic in order to make high quality connections. Allow students to refer to materials they have used or created in class (study guides, unit reviews, glossaries, notes, etc.) to help them think more deeply about the topic and spark ideas.

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Self-generated connections
"Can you describe a situation where you might use your knowledge of photosynthesis?"

Provide examples to kick start brainstorming.
"Learning how to multiply fractions helps me when I need to double my lasagna recipe for company."

Encourage students to share connections.
"Who would you like to share an example of how mental math could be useful in their life?"

Specific connections
"Learning chemistry will allow me to help people in poor countries get clean drinking water. I can use my knowledge of chemicals to determine how to kill bacteria and viruses in water and still be safe for human consumption."

Seeing value in many aspects of student's lives.
"Does this connect to your daily life, your family, your friends, or anything you hope to accomplish in life?"

Provide example connections
"Learning parts of speech helped me when I was trying to learn to speak Spanish. I had to know what a verb, noun, and pronoun were to figure out what order to say them in."

Be aware that different students will make different connections
"Kathryn plays tennis, so learning about rotation and velocity can help her determine where the ball needs to hit on her racquet to produce topspin or backspin."

Telling students how schoolwork is connected.
"You need to learn about photosynthesis because it prepares you for your high school science courses."

Overgeneralizing
"If you are going to cook, you have to be good at multiplying fractions."

Lecturing
"You will never get a good job, if you can't do mental math."

Vague connections
"Learning math will help you in the future."

Focus exclusively on one aspect of their life
"You'll need this to get into college."

Assume your example will be helpful to students.
"You need to know parts of speech so when you take your required Spanish class you know how to structure your sentences."

Assume that all students will connect in stereotypical ways (e.g., boys like sports, girls like shopping).
"Learning about rotation and velocity can help the boys when they play baseball. If they can get the ball to hit different parts of their bat they can force the ball to different parts of the field."