Colleagues,

With recent news of school closures in response to the spread COVID-19, we understand that many parents and guardians have questions about how this will work. We understand that this is a unique situation with local schools closed, while federal offices remain open. We are taking measures to accommodate you, so that you may continue to work remotely under certain guidelines, without worrying about how to care for your family.

Under normal circumstances the Department’s telework policy, Personnel Bulletin 19-02, states that employees cannot personally care for a dependent while teleworking and are responsible for securing appropriate arrangements for any dependents who are unable to care for themselves independently. However, COVID-19 is a unique situation and OPM guidance has allowed for flexibilities in which supervisors may permit employees to telework during school closures, if teleworkers cannot arrange for appropriate dependent care because of an emergency event (such as COVID-19).

In such cases, any time spent providing personal care to dependents cannot be considered hours of work. The employee is expected to accurately account for work and non-work hours during his or her tour of duty and to take the appropriate leave (paid or unpaid) to account for time spent away from normal work-related duties. Employees may also request annual leave in the event they are unable to telework. Please see the Employee Guide posted on the DOI COVID-19 SharePoint site for additional leave flexibilities.

We encourage supervisors and employees to discuss this scenario to determine the limits of the employee’s availability and how communication and work flow would be affected. Supervisors are asked to work with their telework coordinators to ensure these individuals are on approved telework agreements if telework is an option.

For additional information on telework and other flexibilities available to employees, please visit OPM’s COVID guidance website.
The health and safety of DOI employees remains a top priority. If official policy or guidance regarding teleworking changes, we will provide updates.

If you have further questions about this, please contact your supervisor.