US President Obama’s first education advisor receives NTU Honorary Degree

US President Barack Obama’s first education advisor has received an honorary degree from the Nanyang Technological University.

Professor Linda Darling-Hammond received the Degree of Doctor of Education from President S R Nathan at a convocation ceremony at NTU today. The honorary degree is conferred in recognition of her contributions to education in Singapore.

Professor Darling-Hammond had been a member of the National Institute of Education's 2007 International Advisory Panel.

Jeremy Koh had a chat with her to find out what she thinks about Singapore's education system.

Professor Darling-Hammond has been cited as one of the 10 most influential scholars affecting educational policy in the United States.

And in her opinion, a great education system is one that's built on a foundation of excellent teachers. It also needs a curriculum and assessment system that's focused on the needs of today and the future.

In addition, resources should be equitably distributed and adequate to the task, thus enabling all students to gain access to high quality education.

And the professor says Singapore is rightfully thought of having a great education system as it's focussing on all those dimensions.

"Singapore, more than many nations, has tried to resource schools quite adequately and equitably so that all students can expect to come to a good school and have a real chance to develop strong skills and a good life."

And she thinks that the US can learn from Singapore how to build strong systems of education that make quality the norm and not the exception.

"One of the things that the US can learn from Singapore is how to think about building an entire system in which you have schools learning from one another, in which you have the government trying to capture what is best practice and be sure it's disseminated to other schools and in which
it's built into the policy structure of the country."

But then again, no system is perfect, so here's what Professor Darling-Hammond thinks Singapore can improve on.

"I think it's going to be very important to continue to drive progress in the Singapore schools - their efforts to create more opportunities for project work, for investigation and inquiry, not only in the sciences but in other fields as well."